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LETTERS TO A
LADY IN THE COUNTRY
TOGETHER WITH HER REPLIES



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LETTERS TO A LADY IN THE COUNTRY, TOGETHER WITH HER REPLIES

BY
PAUL AND CAROLINE;

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
STUART SHERMAN

"I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man."

—GEO. MEREDITH—PER PAUL.

"Men may have rounded Seraglio Point; they have not yet
doubled Cape Turk."—GEO. MEREDITH—PER CAROLINE.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK · LONDON
1926

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INTRODUCTION

The wide interest and lively curiosity excited by the serial publication of the *Letters to a Lady in the Country* have inevitably suggested the collection of the correspondence in this permanent form. Having been from the outset in happy collusion with the authors, in a sense responsible for their experiment, and in a position well adapted for observing its results, I have easily yielded to their request that I introduce them to their book-reading public, and answer, so far as possible, legitimate inquiries concerning the origin and the “genuineness” of the letters—I say, “so far as possible,” because I am not yet at liberty, for obvious reasons, to disclose the actual names of the writers.

In September, 1924, when Mrs. Van Doren and I were planning the first issue of *Books*, the new literary supplement of the New York *Herald Tribune*, many friends offered their assistance. Among them, at very nearly the last moment, appeared “Paul,” a young man of thirty from Boone County, Kentucky, with

INTRODUCTION

whom we had then but slight acquaintance. He proposed to us an idea which impressed us at once as of a certain attractive novelty and piquancy; and we let him unfold it—at the same time encouraging him, as is the custom of editors on the trail of real game, to disclose as much as he would of his own temperament and personality.

In ten minutes or less, Paul had revealed himself as both an individual and a type. As a type, he was just one of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young Westerners, men and women, of good Western upbringing and education who swarm annually into New York to “break into the writing game,” as they pitifully express it, and “land” in business offices, where the upturn roots of their feeble creative impulses quickly shrivel. Paul distinguished himself for us as an individual by the passionate intensity of purpose which he displayed regarding the preservation of his native roots, his local attachments. The novel idea which he proposed to us sprang out of his strong poetic sentiment for what he kept calling, with a peculiar glowing affectionateness, “our American provinces.”

He had been reading some foreign books,

INTRODUCTION

Russian, Swedish, French—Hamsun, perhaps—I have forgotten just what—which, he declared, had given him a new notion of patriotism, quite detached from politics. His great words were “the soil,” “love of the land,” the “native roots,” and the like. He said that it filled him with indignation to see how “the blessed provincialism” of the average Westerner, Southerner and New Englander was extinguished by the shallow cosmopolitanism of the city. As for himself, he intended to stand out against it. He had come to the city merely to *feel* the country more intensely. And then, with the terseness of one who has served a three-weeks’ apprenticeship in a New York advertising agency, Paul proposed to us something like this:

“You wish, I suppose, to run a *national* review. The trouble with every paper that is published here is that it is edited for Manhattan Island, which is as detached from the rest of America as the Basques are detached from Europe. The widest-eyed of the literary editors can see nothing west of the Hudson, north of Boston, or south of New Haven. How do you suppose the poor devils feel who read one of your smart New York reviews in Byrdstown,

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee, or in Batavia, Ohio, or, if you come to that, in Pinkville, Kentucky? What you need is a link between the city and the provinces, which will show people out there that you are thinking about them, are conscious, you know, that they exist. Here is my scheme. There is a New York girl—that I like a lot—married to an old friend of mine, a native Kentuckian; and she is having the devil's own time adjusting herself to living on the plantation. The man she is married to—awfully good fellow—can't help her much, because—well, he is a bit slow and real blue grass and can't see anything outside of Kentucky. I write to her now and then. There's your link. I'm your link. See? Instead of writing to her occasionally, through the mails, I'll write once a week, you publish the letter in *Books*; and see if you don't get some response."

Paul "sold" us his idea. And in the first issue of *Books*, September 21, 1924, there appeared a column headed *Letters to a Lady in the Country*. At first Paul stuck pretty well to the theme which he had proposed to us, and capitalized to our advantage his obviously poignant homesickness for the woods and waters

INTRODUCTION

of the Ohio. But, as was natural enough, the space in his letters occupied with comment on new books and plays and authors and on his own discovery of life in the city gradually increased. We seemed to detect a softening in his tone toward urban men and customs. At the end of two or three months, we began to twit him gently, when he came into the office, with his infidelity to Pinkville, and to hint that, after all his scorn of apostates from the provinces, he himself was manifestly on the brink of falling in love with New York.

In the main point, however, Paul was a prescient soul, he had not misled us; we got, as he had prophesied, “response” in abundance—all sorts of response. The letters addressed to his friend in Pinkville were answered by all sorts of ladies in all sorts of villages from New Jersey westward to, I think, California. Some insisted on knowing Paul’s age and the color of his eyes and hair. Then there seemed to be a steadily increasing desire on the part of our correspondents to know how Caroline was reacting to Paul; and, lacking her replies, some of our readers offered us very entertaining letters, such as they thought Caroline would have written—

INTRODUCTION

with their permission to print. Finally, after this had gone on for some weeks, one of us—Mrs. Van Doren, I think—said: “Why don’t we get Paul to persuade Caroline to let us use the real replies?”

I was in doubt. Of course, we knew nothing then of Caroline’s talent—a good letter in an envelope may be a very poor letter in a newspaper. Furthermore, it seemed dubious whether, on other grounds, she would consent. The willingness of contemporary young people to turn their personal experience into “copy” was to be one of the prime discoveries in my year above the composing-room. We put Paul up to making inquiry, with the result that, about a third of the way through the series, we were able to begin publishing *The Letters to a Kentuckian in New York*.

As soon as the correspondence became openly two-sided, the editors were obliged to cease even trying to suggest or direct its course. They stepped quite aside and gave the young people their head. They stood aside and wondered what next. From week to week our contributors were simply *writing to each other in print*, developing an already existing relationship, with, as it ap-

INTRODUCTION

peared to us, a delightful but almost incredible unconsciousness of the public, an almost sublime indifference to limelight. Inevitably they ran upon new themes. They steadily discovered themselves and each other. They became tremendously engrossed in the affair. Eventually they were occupying two corners of a situation which some of our readers thought trite, conventional, and disagreeable. The more general feeling, in which the editors shared, was that, between Paul's troubled tenacity and Caroline's poetic subtlety, we were witnessing a vital and illuminating exploration of very modern personalities in unusual circumstances—I refer to the medium through which the exploration was conducted.

When, last April, Caroline was in New York for a week, and, in consequence, we announced there would be no letter that week, two gentlemen promptly wrote in, urging us to "Thank God!" But the main cry was: "Get Caroline back to Kentucky as soon as possible, and go on with the *Letters*. We can't sleep till we learn how it is coming out." Clearly, in some cases, the interest of our readers was due to their feeling that Paul and Caroline were on the verge of a happy

INTRODUCTION

and thoroughly “modern” solution, or dissolution, of an ancient problem. At times the young people themselves exhibit, before the task of squaring the circle, a hopefulness in which my own poor mathematical brains can hardly follow them, much though I enjoy as a spectator the radiancy and the heightened consciousness attendant upon the exploratory efforts of hope, the surge and beating of young desire and imagination along the borders of the unvoyageable inane.

I have looked into a number of faintly analogous collections of letters—for examples: Méri-mée’s *Lettres à une inconnue*, Marcel Prévost’s *Lettres à Françoise*, and Remy de Gourmont’s *Lettres à l’Amazone*. In my judgment, the *Letters to a Lady in the Country* should be compared for genuineness with the first; they are far more genuine than the second and third; and they are clearly distinguishable from all three because they present both sides of a true correspondence, and because the circumstances under which they were written are, as I believe, quite unique.

In conclusion, I may perhaps remark that the editors of *Books* were so little in control of the situation here presented that exactly as it

INTRODUCTION

reached its most interesting phase, Paul, in utter disregard of our editorial requirements, incontinently betook himself to Kentucky for the summer, and, for the nonce at least, terminated the correspondence.

S. P. S.

Letters to a Lady in the Country

NEW YORK CITY,

Sept. 21, 1924.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Well, there you are in Kentucky, weeping your eyes out because you aren't in New York; and here am I in New York, "blaspheming like a Turk," because I am not in Kentucky. But, then, why did you marry two thousand acres of ancestral land, and why did Harriet Monroe persuade me that I was a poet? The harm that woman has done! I'd like to be out shooting partridges, with perhaps Edna St. Vincent Millay in one pocket and Robert Frost in the other. You would like to be painting teacups in Macdougal Alley or watching Jim in New Haven punting the pigskin for "Christo et Ecclesiæ." I got the Harvard motto from Jim's tobacco jar. Instead of that, you are trying to be a "good wife" and "carry on," and feel the essential greatness of Jim as he pushes the pigs into the car for Chicago. Can it be done? I seem to see you sitting in the Cadillac in the freight-yard watching the proc-

LETTERS TO A LADY

ess and looking very fresh and pretty, and it casts a kind of glory on the scene. And I—without much glory—may be visualized as writing advertising for Thorpe, Bidwell & Co. from 9 in the morning till 5 in the afternoon daily; and, from 7:30 at night till my eyelids cease to wag, working on the poems.

My work at the present moment is more than tinctured with Heimweh, which is really what I wanted to write you about. I have never loved Kentucky so much as since I came to New York. I am Kentuckian to the bone and marrow: open my heart and you shall see inscribed upon it "Kentucky." Whatever strength I have came out of her soil, and from being torn up my roots are still bleeding. When I said something like that the other day to a Greenwich Villager, born in northern Maine, he said: "You'll get over that soon; and the best way to cauterize your roots is to settle down here in Greenwich Village."

I tried it for a week in a muddy, sky-blue chamber above the dentista in the Italian quarter; but I had such an infernal attack of homesickness there that I wanted to get away from everything with the smell of New York on it;

IN THE COUNTRY

and now, through the influence of an Alderman, I have obtained a little room, or, rather, a cell, near the top of Grant's Tomb,* over which, you may not know, the inscription is, "Let there be peace," and over which, it is a comfort to know, as I sit here in the sweet silence of midnight, the moon and stars of Kentucky still wheel.

Well! Well! There you are where I long to be, and here I am, where you wish you were! It seems terribly obvious, doesn't it, that we ought to swap our commodities, and get what we want? You send me mistletoe and swamp narcissus and keep the odor of the Kentucky woods about my table. You tell me about the sunrise and the sunset over the tobacco fields, and how the sweet-gum leaves turn at the first frost, "when the horn is heard in the depths of the forest." (Tell me if, little by little, you don't come to love it, and feel the freshness of it stealing into your heart.) Let this be the gold and scarlet illumination of your missal. Within the border you may set down, in as much detail as you like, the miserable devices by which you and the other exiled city women

* Thereabouts.—PAUL.

LETTERS TO A LADY

in the countryside attempt to preserve a little bit of New York at your tea-parties and under the evening lamp—little sniffs and sniffinesses of the city, smuggled into “that better land.”

In return, I know well enough what you would like to have me send you. You would like to have me haunt the theatres and sniff around the book shops and meet the incoming boats, laden to the gunwales with English lecturers, so that I may report to you and you may retail to the members of the Monday Club, a day earlier than any one else, what new thing *vient de paraître*. You would like to have me tell you the color of Sinclair Lewis's hair, and whether Amy Lowell keeps a dog, what Papini thinks of President Butler and what President Butler thinks of Papini, why B—— prefers his third wife to the first, and whether the Prince of Wales uses sugar or salt on his cantaloupe. I realize, dear Caroline, that these matters are of the highest literary interest, and that they are the standard topic for discussion in the American literary-news letter and interview. So far as I can, I will content you. But you must remember that as an advertising man I do not move in literary circles, and as a poet

IN THE COUNTRY

I am a hermit and have not yet been engaged by the Pond Bureau. Such little wisps of gossip as I glean I will send; but they will have floated up to me on the wind to the little aperture in the Tomb, from which I look down on the "smoke tumult" of the city, and dream of Kentucky.

PAUL.

NEW YORK CITY,

Sept. 28, 1924.

DEAR CAROLINE:

You like to read books that some one has marked with signs signifying "Amen!—just my way of thinking," or "That happened once to me," or "I read this paragraph three times—it was so delicious," or "See the watermark; there, just there, I dropped a tear." And so to-day I am sending you, well annotated, a delightful book of interviews—a word which the French Academician loathes, and a thing which the French journalist loves and does to perfection. It is Frédéric Lefèvre's "Une Heure avec . . ." one of the "blue documents" published by the "Nouvelle Revue Française"; and in it you may learn what twenty-seven French writers and Mrs. Jack London think of themselves and of one another. They appear to believe,

LETTERS TO A LADY

by the way, that Jack and James Oliver Curwood are about the last and most important figures on the American scene.

But I am sending you the book all for the sake of a passage that I have marked for you, on pages 15 and 16, where Jean Ajalbert, of Beauvais, chats with M. Lefèvre about a series of monographs which he is editing for the glory of sweet France and, still more, for the honor of the provinces whose various perfumes mingle with intoxicating effect in the national bouquet. *Collection des Petites Patries*, he calls the project. The idea is that each of the petites patries—exquisite untranslatable phrase — each little fatherland, home of the heart, small country of the soul, shall be described in the intimate style of an author who is a native son, capable not only of rendering the physical and moral aspects of his province and its aura of historic association, but capable also of enriching the record with the annotations of his own sentimental relations with the countryside.

Have we ever done anything just like that? In England, every shire, every delectable duchy of foxgloves and heather, almost every little

IN THE COUNTRY

town and parish, has had some studious historian and passionate panegyrist of its uniqueness. Why haven't we? Don't tell me that the clever, incisive articles on the States, which sundry caustic pens have recently been contributing to "The Nation," are "like that." There is nothing of filial affection in the Medusa eyes which those writers turn back upon the home town and the native soil, from the Cosmopolis where they now abide. *La petite patrie?* —no, they have transferred their allegiance to some arid republic of the mind, where children are born without crying and nourished without milk.

La petite patrie—the little fatherland—has a humus for tender roots, and a soft mist tempers and colors the sunlight there and dissolves the hard margins of stones and towers, and somehow lets the soul of them out to mix with whatever friendly human soul is abroad. Do you know that even here, in this distressful city, if you stand close under the hideous iron fire-escapes of a tenement-house and look up sidelong, in just the right gray mood and weather, you cease to see the iron as iron and

LETTERS TO A LADY

the bricks as bricks; the entire façade becomes an emanation, resolves itself into a lacy, fairy-like structure in rose and gray, with fantastic aerial perches, where dark-eyed, pale-faced fairy children come out for a breathing space.

La petite patrie: yesterday I went walking in the rain, thinking of Frost in New Hampshire, and Masters in Spoon River—he's done another "anthology" which you'll want to read, and Sandburg in the "windy city," and O. Henry in Nashville, Tenn., and Harris in Georgia, and Cable in shrimp-fishing, rum-running, creole-haunted, octoroon-colored, river-threatened, bayou-encircled, oleander-scented New Orleans. I went walking in the rain, under an umbrella, my chin on my chest, that phrase between my lips, along the grimy street by the docks, when, above the smell of the wet walks and the saw-dust of warehouses, suddenly I felt myself enveloped in the odor of grapes—blocks and blocks of them; and instantly I saw the book that I shall write some day on the corner of Kentucky where I was born—*ma petite patrie!*

"The only trouble," says M. Ajalbert, of Beauvais, "the only trouble that I have had with my series is due to my discovery that a

IN THE COUNTRY

considerable number of authors acknowledged no *petite patrie*. They all wished to be thought of as Parisians." Alas! Alas! Alas! Next week I will tell you something about the provincials in this city who wish to be thought of as New Yorkers—a piece of high treason, according to

PAUL.

NEW YORK CITY,

Oct. 5, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

You tell me that in talking of myself as if I were a blade of bluegrass I am a sentimentalist. I admit it; and I especially like the sentiment which made you enclose in your last letter a leaf of the pawpaw in the old front yard. Some people seem to think that patriotism means: "Mr. Coolidge—may he always be right; but, right or wrong, Mr. Coolidge." I don't. I am a Little Patriot. What is said and done in Washington sometimes leaves me cold; but I am touched to the quick by the rugged old Tories in the Green Mountains who are going to vote for the sap-buckets of Mr. Coolidge's father. Fidelity to the land and its symbols—just pure elementary sentiment for the soil in which your roots are—it's a thing you

LETTERS TO A LADY

can't reason about, but I know that it is "somehow good" and one of the sweetest elements in contentment.

After my whiff of grapes down by the docks the other day, which transported me for the moment to the vineyards of my petite patrie, I had in mind for a while to write to the editors of "Books" and ask them why they didn't get a lot of devout villagers around the country who think that Heaven is in Charleston, S. C., or in Burlington, Vt., or in Carmel, Calif., or between the purple waters and the snowy crests of the Wasatch Range in Salt Lake City—to write them letters, about a hundred words long, explaining why the country or town or square in which they now live is, with whatever imperfections, the best place in the world to live. Of course, the trouble is, as M. Lefèvre remarked of his French provincials in Paris, that the writers, drifting here, lose their hearts to this siren city and forget "gaunt Ithaca" and the "little people."

Now for the tale of sectional infidelity which I promised you.

I spent this last week-end in the country with Tom Hawkins. Tom is now a publisher's

IN THE COUNTRY

reader in this city and inhabits an old house near Washington Square; but by birth and upbringing the man is a Hoosier out of Indianapolis. When we were at the University of Chicago he was as pious a mid-Westerner as I am. He had a right to be! His ancestors and mine came into Kentucky with Daniel Boone. His great-grandfather knew Nancy Hanks. One of his great-uncles practised law in Springfield with Lincoln, and another was Mayor of Chicago. His own family helped build Indianapolis and owned half the county. He was intensely proud of the West. He loved the cornlands, and even praised the landscape as he walked through it with the long, swinging stride of a pioneer. "Here's where they grow tall men," he used to say; and of the flat country he would declare: "There is as much sublimity in the horizontal as in the vertical. The infinite extends from east to west as well as from the nadir to the zenith."

He insisted that mid-Western English was standard English, and scorned to soften his flat a's and rolling r's out of compliance with what he called "stage usage." When we went walking on the prairie in the springtime I used to

LETTERS TO A LADY

quote Madison Cawein at him, and he used to quote James Whitcomb Riley at me till we were both furious.

Besides all that he was a militant champion of new times, new people and new things. He always asserted that he loved the West because it wasn't musty and cluttered with historical rubbish. "Starting later than New England," he said, "is all to our advantage; we are relatively modern, up-to-date and infinitely more comfortable." He was a prohibitionist before the Eighteenth Amendment, and a free-trader, a follower of Ingersoll and a theoretical Socialist. He pretended, at least, to rejoice in the fraternal insolence of common people, and I recall his glee when an overalled expressman entered Dean Lovett's office at the university, and, without removing his hat, accosted a group of professors there with "Which one of you fellows is Lovett?" "Catch an expressman at Princeton admitting that a professor is his equal and ought to be treated like a brother!"

He began to write for the Chicago papers, and he used to sketch me the house he would build when his salary rose to \$30 a week: "A new house, on a new street, and everything in

IN THE COUNTRY

it new—new furniture from Grand Rapids, with drawers that will open and shut, big modern domestic rugs that will cover the floor, electric lights, a modern tub with hot water day and night, paved streets in front of my door, and progress—and no junk, by George!” In the course of time Tom learned, as some of the Chicago writers do, to write; and so he came to New York.

When I first saw Tom, after our five years' separation, I said to myself: “What's got into the man? He's all mannerisms and affectations!” He had quite lost his big Western stride. He minced along the sidewalks as if he were leading a lady to the glove counter. He employed a very broad Italian “a,” and he pronounced his final “r's” as I had supposed only the Bostonians did—that is, he didn't pronounce them at all. He had lost his old shibboleths and had got a set of new ones. These were the least of his alterations, as I discovered in spending the week-end with my old Hoosier friend and his New England wife at their country place in the corner of Connecticut.

Tom has bought an old white Colonial house with green blinds, which he tells me regretfully

LETTERS TO A LADY

is fifty years younger than some of the buildings in his valley. "I'm sorry to say," he explains, "that it can't be dated earlier than the Mexican War." He points out, however, with immense satisfaction his seven smoky, crumbling fire-places, his brass warming-pan, his hall clock, that doesn't run, the rag rugs on the painted floor, the highboys, the four-poster beds, the crazy-quilts, the sad little looking-glasses falling from frames a hundred years old, the rusty bolts that won't slide, on doors that won't close, and the well-sweep in the yard, with which, when it is repaired, he expects to draw water, when the well isn't dry, from a source which I hope is fit to drink.

We spent Saturday night and most of Sunday examining Tom's collection of the family histories of Connecticut, and talking about his experiences as selectman and juryman in his village, about which he struts as magnificently as if his seventh great-grandfather had been the first settler. He is writing an antiquarian novel to be called "Old Days in Bridgeport"; and he is buying up the farm land around his own place like a grasping, hard-headed Yankee. He didn't breathe a word to me of socialism, but

IN THE COUNTRY

spoke of property reverently, like Sir Walter settling down in Abbotsford. Nor did he mention his prohibition hobby; but he showed me a dainty little ancient book on home-brewing, "The Squire's Home-Made Wines, as described and set forth in the Journal of Thomas Hoggson, Gent." 1765. And after I had crept by candlelight up the creaking narrow stairs to bed under my crazy-quilt he brought me a pewter tankard of the hardest cider I ever saw — "from the apples," he beamed, "of my own orchard." Tom is an awfully good fellow, but he is a traitor.

You needn't fear, Caroline, that I shall go that way! When I look out from my window at the siren's towers and palaces I think of the small boy in Paris and I laugh. You remember what he said to the stranger?—

"My father's in a better place than this!"

"Where is your father, my boy?" *

"He's in Schaghticoke, New York."

Substitute Boone County, Kentucky, and you will know how faithfully I am PAUL.

* There is a story something like this, about Schenectady, in *Daisy Miller*.—P.

LETTERS TO A LADY

NEW YORK CITY,
Oct. 12, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Yes, of course you are right: everything that is capable of making us very happy is capable of making us very miserable. Probably that is true of attachment to places, which I praise on the theory that to make places lovely you must love them. In fact, I have received this morning a letter from an angry Yankee in the Locks and Canals Company, of Lowell, Mass., who is in no doubt about the matter. He writes: "Attachment to one's native place is the devil. Confound your accursed Letters to a Lady in the Country! Do you want to break up my family?" The poor man goes on to explain that he is married to an inconvertible Southerner and has had awfully hard luck in attempting to transplant her to New England. Here is the gist of what he says:

My wife was reared down in Dixie on a rice plantation and, in 1850, her people were pretty comfortable. The South is a passion in her blood. She grew up tropically with a dozen white men hanging around, making chivalrous speeches to her, and with a dozen "niggers" loafing around ready, when she whistled, to harness a horse or launder endless white dresses or roast a chicken or pick up a fan or

IN THE COUNTRY

perfume the house with jasmine for a birthday feast, and so on, and so on. Well, she is "attached" to these things, all right; and, in consequence, she hates what we do and what we don't do here—hates Lowell, hates New England, hates the neighbors, and three-fourths of the time she hates me for bringing her up to this "horrible country."

There isn't much Southern nonsense in the society of Lowell, Mass., but we've lived here twenty years; we stand well in the community; we are a hundred times more comfortably fixed than her Georgia people are; we've got two smart little Yankee boys in the high school; yet there isn't a week goes by that she doesn't come sighing around: "I want to go home, I want to go home, I must go home." It's no use to tell her that Lowell is home. "No! No! No!" she says, "I mean real home!" I don't know what a man should do after twenty years of that—whether to kiss and console her or to tell her to go straight to—Georgia and stay there!

That's the way it is most of the time. But I never can tell when it's going to be infinitely worse—when midnight will be drenched in her tears and dawn break on her red-eyed and disconsolate. And then some evening she will see a good-looking colored woman on the street, or she will hear some one singing "The Suwanee River"; and once, in a fit of idiocy, I gave her a bottle of jasmine perfume on her birthday—and she had a "collapse," and the next day she packs her trunk and goes down to Georgia and stays two months, three months, half a year, leaving me and the boys keeping bachelors'

LETTERS TO A LADY

hall together. Well, she's gone now—that second silly letter of yours sent her to Georgia, and the Lord knows when she will be back again. Don't tell me attachment to places is an element in contentment. It is rank foolishness.

So far as plain, practical people are concerned, I suppose the grass widower in Lowell is right. Probably you, Caroline, would be happier in Kentucky, if you killed your heart and never dreamed of coming back to New York to live. In America, where every one is moving about looking for a "better 'ole," it's lucky that most of us haven't much local sentiment, that wounds heal quickly, that we forget the old home and the old friends and that a Hoosier like Hawkins can nestle into a corner of Connecticut and in five years clean forget where in Indianapolis the Soldiers' Monument is. But, do you know, I think we aren't going to have poetry or poetic fiction in America that will make us love the land as Englishmen love Kent and Cornwall till we learn to use in literature the precious emotion exhibited in the raw by this Georgia wife.

A touch of homesickness is necessary to bring out the finest qualities of experience and

IN THE COUNTRY

distill it into letters. I reached that conclusion independently by reflecting on the qualities of Boone County after my absence from it had made reflection hurt. But I met a man last August on the Boulevard Raspail who has just said the same thing in "The Transatlantic Review"—Mr. Ford Madox Ford, one of our elders, who refuses to grow stale, but writes with the freshness of the morning. I used to wonder why he lived in Paris and wrote there, and I wondered after I met him. He is a perfect English type—not the violent, blaspheming, domineering sort of person I had guessed him to be in the least, but a very gentle-voiced, largish, oldish, clay-colored man in a clay-colored suit and drooping clay-colored mustache with unmistakably English roses in his cheeks. We talked about Conrad, who had died in Kent while I was making a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas in Canterbury. In "Le Journal Littéraire" Ford, expressing himself as well as he could on the spur of that painful moment, saluted his Polish collaborator as "the last Don Quixote de la Mancha of the mot juste in England." But in the extraordinarily interesting "Conrad Supplement" to the September

LETTERS TO A LADY

“Transatlantic” he more subtly interprets the spirit and passions of his friend through his own nostalgia for the South Downs; and I see now that Ford Madox Ford lives in Paris in order that his heart may ache exquisitely for England—as mine aches for Kentucky.

PAUL.

N. Y. C.,
Oct. 19, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Do you remember how we used to speculate on what sort of a person he really is, outside of his books? Who? Well, see if you can guess. Last night I was sitting, rather solitary, at my loophole in Grant’s Tomb looking at a long string of white lights led by a red light moving through the liquid darkness between me and the constellation of the Palisades—a tugboat and her scows stealing down the Hudson; and I was glancing at the one big star in the West and wondering what o’clock it was in Kentucky and whether you had found agarics for dinner, whether you had some of that Japanese clematis on the table, whether you were wearing blue or that cherry-colored gown and which way you had done your hair—and quite a number of other things were occurring to me,

IN THE COUNTRY

when suddenly there was a knock at the door and he came in.

He gave me a strong hand-grip and I looked up, for though I am reasonably tall he runs up like a poplar, 6 feet 2, I think, and straight and lean, topped by a smallish, longish, thinnish, sandy-red head, with blue eyes, keen and eager but pleasant, like a falcon feasting. Some friends of mine in Thorpe, Bidwell & Co., who know him well, came in a little later. They called him "Red" and he, with a touch of easy fraternity, which made me think of the stage and then forget it, called the men by their first names and all the girls "my dear." I offered him a fresh pack of Tareytons. When I looked for it a moment later it was in his pocket. He explained, "Mark of a thoughtful smoker," and put it back into his pocket. He consumes a good deal of smoke and he also is a thirsty soul, for in the course of the evening he emptied the pitcher of ice-water that I had set beside him.

But he was not like some geniuses I have met, physically restless, setting other people's nerves on edge by stalking about and gesticulating and demanding always to be at the

LETTERS TO A LADY

centre of the stage. He seemed to possess his powers, not to be possessed by them. He sat quite at ease, listened well, conversed with sharp attention to what others were saying, never spoke of himself when any one started another subject a hundredth part as interesting, and, in fact, only took the gaps in the talk for himself. But when there was a vacant interval, instantly he filled it, as if he abhorred a vacuum—filled it with picture and drama and anecdote and witticism and jest and marvellous mimicry—filled it with a pouncing hawklike speech, swooping to the point.

The darting swiftness of his own perceptions makes him impatient of drawling and fumbling. You know how an Englishman syncopates his polysyllables: “extrordnry.” Well, Red syncopates entire sentences, paragraphs and chapters, like that. Give him a hint, and he will instantly impersonate for you the pompous drone, heavily setting out to inform a roomful of patient victims what they have known since they were christened: “Now, you hear what I’m telling you. Say what you like for your Dep-Gomez roadster. A little old Ford car is . . . Why, man, do you know you can get the

IN THE COUNTRY

parts of a Ford car anywhere in . . ." etc., etc.

Three years ago, I saw him once before in action, when his fame was just coming up "like thunder," on the heels of "Main Street," and his publishers, I suppose, had sent him out through the country to show himself to the people. He had lived a long time "in the wilderness" then; and he went into it as a big lark, frankly enjoying the rousing welcome he got. But, my dear, let me assure you, he gave as good as he got. There was nothing then, there is nothing now, half-hearted in the man; he gives himself utterly. He swept into town like a tornado, well wound up and whirling rapidly, at 8 o'clock in the morning. From the train, he stepped into the arms of an "entertainment committee"—the American variant of the Spanish Inquisition; and all day long he whirled from one group to another, intoxicating each as he passed, pouring enthusiasm into young authors, astounding pedants, captivating newspaper men, writing autographs with distinctive inscriptions into dozens and dozens of his books, shaking hands with scores and scores of admirers—giving to each some personal word to remember; at 6 a reception, with

LETTERS TO A LADY

several hundred individual greetings—from him; at 7, a big dinner and an after-dinner speech; at 8, a brilliantly successful and dramatic address, without notes, to an audience of two thousand; and, from 9:30 to 2 in the morning, a “smoker” and an “aftermeeting,” through which he flashed responses to a roomful of questioning young people, till he was knocked down by his host and put to bed. It did not kill him; but he has supped full of that form of glory; and now hates lecturing.

But to fill the vacuum, he gives himself to merriment in private gatherings; and is acquiring a kind of legendary character as the Don Quixote de la Mancha of the Joyous Life. I have heard tales of his breaking up a long London frost by making, at a dinner party, a half-dozen different speeches in succession, in each perfectly impersonating some English celebrity, and then capping the performance with a seventh speech in his own person, by special request of the toastmaster. Here in this city, it is said that he will sometimes sweep in, an unexpected guest, at a feast that is lagging, and, taking command by something like divine right, turn the dinner table into a cabinet meet-

IN THE COUNTRY

ing, or, improvising a stage, make dumb folk speak and sing, make wits of numskulls, and impart to every one present, for at least one evening of his life, an hilarious and exuberant personality, endowed with spirits and eloquence. "It's just Red playing," they say, but if half the tales are true, it must be something like Apollo in Picardy. He is forty years old; he has done a lot of good work; and, at that age, I suppose a man had better begin to play a little, if he expects to, ever.

But, do you know, the point about this man that impresses me most, next to his gaiety, is his seriousness. He told me that, when he was at Yale, he was shy, a recluse, a grind, an enormous reader, a great admirer of one of the English lecturers down there, and himself contemplated becoming a doctor and a don. More than half seriously, he has within the last year sighed for an academic connection; and when our universities outgrow their dread of having any suspicion of genius associated with their faculties, Red may have a chance. He has sides that people don't much recognize. For example, his favorite book is "Marius the Epicurean," and he has worked himself as lean

LETTERS TO A LADY

as Dante to transfer to modern American realism some of the quality of conscientiousness possessed by that golden book. What's his reward? Well, his friends—men like Mr. Hergesheimer, for example, who handle the more or less patently "beautiful"—pat him on the back and say, "Good work, Red; our own interests are quite different, of course; but there's a place for honest journalism, too. Good work, Old Man." There doesn't seem to be any rancor in him. He is infinitely droll when he gets off a thing like that. He is a generous appreciator of his contemporaries—of Hergesheimer, Miss Cather, Cabell, Anderson's earlier work, Miss Sinclair, Walpole, and Wells.

The only kind of contemporary work toward which he exhibited positive impatience is "the psycho-analytic stuff." "But don't you think there is something in it?" I asked. "Yes," he replied, "but see how —— uses it. Here's a man who is rude. 'Ah,' he exclaims, 'inferiority-complex.' That's all he's got to say about him. Pitches the rudeness into the complex box, and drops it. Dodges all the hard work of analysis. Makes no attempt to find out what the rudeness really means." Red doesn't dodge

IN THE COUNTRY

his "hard work." For that, I respect him immensely. And I suspect that when that fellow is at work—which he is pretty regularly for four hours every morning, though he may have danced and talked all night—there are few human organisms in America more intensely and efficiently occupied.

There is another thing Red is terribly serious about. That is the state of intellectual life in our small towns. When he got off that stuff about the Ford car, one of us said to him: "Three-fourths of all our talk everywhere is like that." "Yes," he said, "and the heart-breaking thing is that satire doesn't affect it." He knotted his lash in the Gopher Prairie story. I open at random to this summary of our mood: "It is contentment . . . the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dulness made God."

Red is serious, too, about his next book. The first one, I suppose, will be the story of a man of forty who is hunting for something to live for which won't be quite such a bore as listen-

LETTERS TO A LADY

ing to the American phonograph. I asked him if he knew how the story was coming out—in short, whether he knows anything really satisfactory that a man who has lived quite a bit can do after he is forty. He is foggy about it. He is going back to Europe to see if “objectives” are more distinct over there. Meanwhile the only things he has yet discovered which he rates as strictly first-class satisfactions are hard work and friendships—and I wish you might hear him bringing out the qualities of his friends—all kinds of friends from the Yale professor to the most violent specimen of the Cellini type.

If it weren’t long past midnight I would expatiate a bit on Red’s saying that “God has a bad record,” and on the sudden earnestness with which he explained, “I tell you, Paul, beauty is dangerous. It’s dangerous as poison.” I’m keen to see his next book. How it comes out will be pretty interesting to you and me both, ten years hence. My own dream for my “mediæval” period is to settle, really settle, into a delightful country place with acres of flowers and write poetry, read philosophy and look at the church steeple, half a mile away over the

IN THE COUNTRY

tree tops. I tried to make Red see that as the dénouement for his new novel. If he had a flower-garden in Boone County and two drops of Southern languor in his blood he might discover that he hasn't exhausted the possibilities of American life yet. But he can't see it; he likes flowers, but is impatient of gardening. He has lighted a torch, and is bent on sustaining his ecstasy. This is a letter, isn't it?

PAUL.

N. Y. C.,
Oct. 26, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

What is the happiest time in your week and in your day? If you haven't such a time make one, put one in—regularly; otherwise you are in danger of hurrying from dawn to dusk and from one Monday to the next, through the idlest round of activities, without once having stopped to be glad you are alive—as I am, rather frequently, that you are. So far as I can make out, from a little observation and a lot of reading in the stories of Mary Wilkins Freeman, Margaret Deland and those people, the defect in New Englanders of the old type isn't so much that they are harried by the

LETTERS TO A LADY

famous “New England conscience” as that they simply *never take the trouble* to be happy. If happiness comes to them, why, they thank God for it, like a mother who has waited forty years for her first and last child; but if it doesn’t come they just sit around and wait—“serene I fold my hands and wait,” like Emily Dickinson,* no matter if they are overlooked till the judgment day.

Don’t you like to “think things over” and put the good ones together? My time for doing that is Sunday morning. I’ve just been doing it, and I’m as happy as a king is not, happy as a “shepherd on the Delectable Mountains.” I haven’t sold a poem yet, but I live here in “holy poverty,” like St. Francis, and make hymns to the October morning sunlight, which just now is dancing on red bricks, green domes, gray roofs, orange-colored trains and brown gas-tanks, all the way to the pale-blue mist, where the East River is. I was up an hour ago, breakfasted on a pint of milk and four crackers, lighted my pipe and watched like a duck-hunter in the reeds for thoughts to arise. I have had, for me, a rather “colorful” week, and thoughts

* Emily “waited,” but the quoted line is another’s.—PAUL.

IN THE COUNTRY

come up out of the last seven or ten days like a flight of those Menelaus butterflies from Guiana. I don't know a pleasanter Sunday morning occupation than revery, not excepting church-going. But you, you are still probably lying abed, wasting the October morning, or, worse yet, dawdling over the breakfast-table with Jim, reading the newspaper. Aren't you?

You complain in your last letter that I don't answer your questions and that I don't tell you enough about what is going on. I'm sorry and hereby make amends.

(1) Yes, I did see Walter de la Mare, but I don't know whether there is any hope of enticing him as far as Kentucky to speak to the Monday Club. I believe he is now delivering the poetry lectures at Johns Hopkins. He gave here a lecture on fiction, on which he has some interesting ideas, particularly the notion that the novel should be the vehicle of the author's idealism, that he should put the best of his wisdom and beauty into it. His voice, manner and his humor have the same quiet charm as his writing. But did you see, in "Books," the notion, for which his biographer Megroz is apparently responsible, that he has "the gait of

LETTERS TO A LADY

a sailor, the figure of a yeoman”? It is absolutely absurd! He is eminently a civilian, of slight build and rather below the average stature, so that he was just visible above the reading desk. He made no gestures, except a lifting of the left eyebrow, wrinkling his forehead on that side into half-a-dozen humorous crescents.

And to my fancy, he strongly resembles Charles Lamb in Dick’s engraving in my old edition of Lamb’s works, published by the Harpers in 1838—sitting at a table in a carved mahogany chair and leaning forward to collate by the light of two candles a tall ancient folio, propped upright before him, with the two books on which his elbows are resting. He affects me like that.

If the Monday Club can’t “get to see” him, I would suggest to the Monday Club what Monday clubs are always forgetting, that reading an author is an awfully good substitute for seeing him. Induce those dear ladies by your own example, dear Caroline, to read the “Collected Poems.” He cannot possibly say anything to them in prose as exquisite as that ravishing stanza in “England”:

IN THE COUNTRY

“Thy breaking seas like trumpets peal;
Thy clouds—how oft have I
Watched their bright towers of silence steal
Into infinity.”

And then, if you wish to balance the ration and to put yourself back into the personal atmosphere of spirits akin to Walter de la Mare and Lamb, follow the silver flute of William Hazlitt through those two infinitely delectable essays, the finest of the sort ever written, the very ecstasy of personality in letters—“My First Acquaintance with Poets” and “Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen.”

(2) Speaking of Lamb reminds me of “first nights,” and “first nights” remind me of “moral holidays,” and they in turn remind me that I have just seen Schildkraut in “The Firebrand,” a performance doubly interesting as it marked the first appearance of Horace Livright as a theatrical producer. It was a “colorful” affair, and even Dryden or Congreve would have called it a merry one. I was particularly taken by the acting of the naughty Duke, and by the sweet imbecility of his manner when he said, “That sounds reasonable to

LETTERS TO A LADY

me.” When the curtain fell on the second act I fell, too—into laughter more profound than I can easily explain, unless the Monday Club can allure the players out to Boone County, which I’m not sure the local clergy would approve. The special flavor of the piece, however, was in this: It is ostensibly of the Italian Renaissance, with Cellini as hero, yet the audience took it, I verily believe, as playful satire on contemporary manners, and laughed benignantly at their own images in its glass. The note of it you can find in Vanbrugh’s “The Provoked Wife”: “No boy was ever so weary of his tutor, no girl of her bib, no nun of doing penance, or old maid of being chaste, as I am of being married. Sure there’s a secret curse entailed upon the very name of wife.”

Well, there’s your news. But have you ever thought what you like best in a letter—whether it is the news or the part which—how shall I express it?—merely establishes a relation? I think the dullest, most disappointing letters I have ever received were long ones from dear friends in Europe who conscientiously covered ten or fifteen pages of rice paper with substantial accounts of scenery and palaces by which

IN THE COUNTRY

they, poor dears, had been enthralled. On the other hand, the published letters of Henry James to some of his lady friends, though almost devoid of substance, impressed me as singularly fascinating, throughout three or four pages of bowing and greeting and revision of the relationship, terminating in a courtly, "Believe me, dear Mrs. Whateveryournameis, ever most devotedly and all faithfully yours."

Which reminds me that I recently ran across, in a French journal, an amusing discussion of the question—more or less debated, wasn't it? —in one of Mrs. Wharton's earlier novels, "*The Touchstone*"—whether love letters should ever be published. From this well-triturated stamping-ground of ethical theory, the discussion passed to a second question, in the field of æsthetics, "What is the best love letter ever written?" When the masterpiece of amorous epistolography was finally produced, it did not come, I believe, from the collections of Rousseau or George Sand or Musset or Byron or the Carlyles or the Brownings, or from any of the Gribble-haunted archives; and it was generally agreed that there could have been no grave ethical impropriety in publishing it, if

LETTERS TO A LADY

there had been any great public demand for it. As nearly as I can remember it, this was the letter in its entirety:

“To-night. 7:30 o’clock. At the place agreed upon.”

PAUL.

NEW YORK,
Nov. 2, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

The last time I wrote to you I used the word “colorful” twice, in apologetic quotation marks, and swore it should never slip from my pen again. But what can one do? Every one in this city is intoxicated with color; and I, who have been tippling on it all the fall, have been drunk as a lord with it this last week. Monday morning the absence of your letter from the mail and the presence there of five rejected poems of mine turned me to a nightshade blue and started me on the day with a dark-brown taste in my mouth. But, as I had risen late, I took a bright-yellow taxi from the subway to Thorpe, Bidwell & Co. As the street is torn up there I had to walk two blocks and look in at the shop windows. I noticed that cars which I had supposed to be black are gray, seal-brown, blue, green, yellow and scarlet.

IN THE COUNTRY

I observed that gowns, which I have never much attended to before, shade from a matutinal and virginal rose through a deep inebriating port-wine red to honey-colored and orange. Then I went up in the elevator, and the girl at the adjoining desk, who wears green stockings and has her desk covered with samples of Indian tan, peach, rose, beige, Airedale and silver, told me that "Biddy" wished to see me as soon as I came in.

Mr. Bidwell plans all our big advertising campaigns. He says the last word about our copy. My heart sank into my boots for fear that he was on the point of saying the last word about mine. He is a business man, and I am a poet—or had supposed that I was. Consequently, having no ambition to rise in his field above the level of a mere bread-winner, I was not much "intrigued" by him till the girl in the green stockings told me something about his habits. What she told me led me to fear that perhaps he is a better poet than I am. He is seldom in his office more than two hours a day. The rest of the time he is out meeting people and seeing things—everything: automobile shows, exhibitions of old lace, fox hunts,

LETTERS TO A LADY

art galleries, department stores, concerts, factories of all sorts, dances, horse races, theatres. On week-ends he darts to Chicago, or sniffs Memphis, or the MacDowell Colony, or Tallahassee. Every summer he is in Rome, London, Paris or Vienna. Besides all that, he reads enormously in current literature—fiction, travels, poetry, everything. As I entered his office I thought all the season's books must be stacked in the case behind him, and all the month's magazines piled on his desk.

He said: "Look at this," and handed me a little picture that he had bought in a *café* on Montparnasse, showing a Spanish girl with jet-black, lustrous hair, a white scarf striped with yellow about her neck, the ends flying in the wind, a white sweater-coat banded with green, white sport skirt, white stockings and white shoes. I looked. Then he said "Look at this" and tore a page from the advertising section of a magazine. Against a background of green night seen through a window heavily draped in crimson-black over a glass-curtain of indigo a young girl sits on a balustrade in a violet-colored evening dress, looking down at some one below; and the light coming up from the

IN THE COUNTRY

dance hall flickers in her violet ruffles and bursts into a golden glow on her breast. When I had studied this picture for a moment, Bidwell said abruptly: "I understand you write poetry." I admitted it, judging that Nan Peters—that girl with the green stockings—had betrayed me. "Any of it with you? Let me see it!" I produced the five rejected poems. He thumbed and grunted through them in about two and a half minutes. "Umph!" he said. "Same trouble with this stuff as with the copy you are writing for us—no color! Don't you ever notice anything? The whity-gray phase of civilization is over! Here! Take these into your office"—he handed me two October magazines and a weekly paper—"read through the advertising and see if you can find out what color the season's books are."

Two hours later I sent him a list of new books, of which this is a copy: "The Purple Sapphire," by John Taine; "The White Oxen," by Kenneth Burke; "The Red Riders," by Thomas Nelson Page; "The Green Hat," by Michael Arlen; "Black Laughter," by Llewelyn Powys; "Sackcloth and Scarlet," by George Gibbs; "The Golden Bed," by Wallace Irwin;

LETTERS TO A LADY

"Tales from Silver Lands," by Charles J. Finger; "Green Thursday," by Julia E. Peterkin; "The Flaming Terrapin," by Roy Campbell; "The White Monkey," by John Galsworthy; "The Beauty of the Purple," by William Stearns Davis; "The Flame of Happiness," by Florence Ward; "The House with the Green Shutters," by George Douglas; "Hawaii, the Rainbow Land," by Katherine Pope; "Red Dawn," by Pio Baroja, and "Peacock Feathers," by Temple Bailey.

Bidwell wrote me a note: "You've got the idea; now follow it up!" But the color didn't really "get" me till Friday, when Tom Hawkins, who had been a little "peeved" by what I said about his old house in the country, came around with his car and took me up into Connecticut again. But this time he had filled the car up with poets!—besides Mrs. Tom there were Sidney, Godiva and Fiammetta. It was a misty, golden October afternoon, and as soon as we began to wind into the Connecticut hills I exclaimed: "O Zeus the Saviour, and Victory! Is this New England?—the New England of white houses and green blinds, of gray lives and Plymouth Rocks and Robert Frosts?" Color

IN THE COUNTRY

burst upon us like a prairie fire. Maple and oak and hickory in scarlet, yellow, and purple flamed on the ridges, on the slopes wove intricate patterns of Persian tapestry, smouldered in the blue mist of the hollows among the dark evergreen, and, leaning over the mirror of the slowly winding river, glassed themselves there for miles and miles. It wasn't like Turner. It wasn't like Tintoretto or Titian; it was more like Rubens—a mellow, gorgeous, warm, wine-drunken, bacchanalian revel of color; and over there among the violet shadows of that bronze thicket it required little imagination to fancy the ruddy god himself, in his tawny leopard skin, driving his leopard-drawn chariot into India.

We all began to sing “Jerusalem the Golden,” which was the nearest thing to a Bacchic pæan that we poor Puritans knew. We were intoxicated, joyously delirious, with color—and with nothing else! We sang till we were exhausted. We sang till night fell and a white moon rose, and we were driving up toward Tom's place through lanes of maple, crimson in the moonlight. Then Fiammetta and Godiva—Godiva is lily-colored and soprano; Fiammetta is pansy-colored and contralto—began to chant together

LETTERS TO A LADY

from memory one magnificent poem after another; the Ode to the West Wind, the Ode to the Skylark, the Ode on a Grecian Urn, the Ode to the Nightingale, the Choruses in "Atalanta," and the Hymn to Proserpine. It had a high tragic thrill for me, like a Greek chorus chanting in the "Agamemnon." It taught me for the first time what poetry really is—rhythmical color and singing flame. And when I went to bed that night under Tom's ancestral crazy-quilt, and the moonlight fell upon its multi-colored pattern and on the hooked rug on the floor, I saw for the first time what our New England grandmothers, looking out on these hills, had been pathetically striving to make those patched bits of rags say to their children:

"Look now where Color, the soul's bridegroom,
makes
The house of heaven splendid for the bride."

PAUL.

DEAR CAROLINE:

NEW YORK,
Nov. 9, '24.

Isn't it curious the odd times notions take for popping into your head? This morning

IN THE COUNTRY

while I was shaving—in the soft early sunlight, with a kind of suave coolness coming in at the open window—I noticed that I was humming “There is a land of pure delight.” I pulled myself up short, and, wiping my razor blade, I said to myself: “There isn’t, either. That’s all nonsense. Delight isn’t pure, anywhere. It’s very mixed. And for my part I prefer red-winged blackbirds to scarlet tanagers, and always shall. No, I shall not vote for La Follette, even if all the rest of the literati do. I shall vote for —.” There I cut a little red gash in my chin and went on shaving.

Pretty soon I noticed that I was humming again: “Ever’body talks about hebbun ain’t goin dah—hebbun, hebbun.” Mixed up vaguely with the song, drifting along on it, was a notion that politics haven’t much to do with happiness, except in case of war, and that I’d rather be spending election day hunting squirrels in the big woods down by the Ohio than at the polls. After that I began to wonder whether my last letter on the color of gowns in the Fifth Avenue shops might not give you a bad attack of Carol Kennicottitis, when, sure enough, in came your letter, crying that the country gen-

LETTERS TO A LADY

try of Boone County and their wives and their daily bridge parties and their weekly overeating parties are boring you "to extinction." And then your poignant little postscript—three words and a question mark. "What is happiness?" asked jesting Caroline, and would not stay for an answer.

But, trust me, you'll get one! You and I and all of us are terribly confused nowadays by having to live in between decayed notions of pure delight in heaven and decadent notions of pure delight on earth. Those hymns, those hymns—they set up in us a longing for eternal ecstasy. When the walls of the New Jerusalem fade, then we turn, some of us turn to earth and attempt to find eternal ecstasy in Babylon. I love the multi-colored banners under which we are marching against the black and white society of our fathers, but the predominance of flame and scarlet colors gives our procession, just now, a slightly hectic look. "I wear a crimson cloak to-night," chants Lois Seyster Montross; "My candle burns at both ends," chants Edna Millay, "it gives a lovely light." Even Percy MacKaye, after a summer in my Kentucky mountains, urges us to "stare in the

IN THE COUNTRY

blindin' eyeball of the Lord—a—beautiful," which I suspect would be "trying." To burn always with a gemlike flame, to sustain an intense color, I call the aspiration of a scarlet tanager. It reminds me also a little of the wicked princess, or whatever she was, who "danced in red-hot slippers till she danced herself to death."

You taught me that every good song must have a climax—a point where it soars aloft in a shattering prelude to rest and appeasement. But a good many people nowadays seem to be bored if they have to listen to anything but climaxes. Here is Anatole France, for example, teaching us that between two infinities of nothingness the only thing of any considerable importance is "the ephemeral intoxication of a kiss." Judging from the theatrical posters and magazine cover designs in our office, showing numberless couples in just that moment of intoxication, the advertising men in Thorpe, Bidwell & Co. are overwhelmingly in accord with Anatole France. In my opinion it shows deficient sense for composition and contrast to make so much of the high points. Now my notion is that Carol Kennicottitis, or the re-

LETTERS TO A LADY

volt against bread and butter, is mainly due to a tremendous overvaluation of the climax as compared with the rest of the song of life, out of which the climax mounts.

Take, for another sort of example, mountain-climbing. How absurd it would be to assert that the pleasure of mountain-climbing is concentrated into the fifteen minutes that one spends at the top. The people who believe that ascend by train, when there is one. With a party of such gourmets of mountain-tops, I started up Snowdon last summer, but, thank goodness, before we were a third of the way up, shame and sense came to two or three of us, and we jumped from the train and walked, taking all the pleasure that God had provided for us in rough cobble, hot sun and palpitating hearts. Without that there is no real thrill at the summit. "To go up by train," as a good English sportsman that I met there remarked, "isn't quite playing the game, is it?" No; and it doesn't purify the delight of mountain-tops either; on the contrary it destroys your capacity for a really heart-filling sense that you've got there.

When I first came to the city I supposed that to write advertising during the daytime

IN THE COUNTRY

would be punishment, mitigated by the pleasure of writing poetry at night. But one night when I was looking at a violet and crimson sunset at the end of a dusky street of warehouses, it flashed on me for the first time—aged thirty this November!—that those hideous warehouses were an integral part of the beauty of the sunset, and I didn't want them removed. The next afternoon I saw a butterfly alight on the rim of a hogshead of molasses; instantly, this time, it dawned on me that, in that relation, not merely the butterfly, but the hogshead as well, was beautiful. That night I walked down Fifth Avenue with Fiammetta, and above the Flatiron Building we saw the full moon hanging around as if it were tethered to the roof by a string—like a child's balloon. The relation made that cold white beauty for once seem charmingly human and friendly; and I wouldn't have removed the Flatiron Building for anything.

“When the moon shines over the cowshed,
I'll be waiting for you at the kitchen door.”

In those lines of the doughboy's lyric, the moonshine doesn't help the cowshed and the kitchen door any more than the kitchen door

LETTERS TO A LADY

and the cowshed help the moonshine. Isn't that the best part of our modern feeling about beauty and about happiness—that they aren't in circumstances at all, but are just a casual light that plays over them, when it is in us? Try it on the gentry of Boone County and their wives! What is that poem of Thomas Hardy's that I read in a magazine ages ago, and haven't seen since? One stanza falls into this Critique of Pure Beauty and Pure Delight:

“Never a faded wife but shows,
If joy suffuse her,
Something beautiful to those
Patient to peruse her.”

PAUL.

NEW YORK,
Nov. 16, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

This morning, for the first time since I began writing to you, I regretted my single blessedness and wished that I were married! At first I did not see why such a wave of self-pity invaded me immediately after I had breakfasted and had sat down to my Sunday letter. But, on looking out the window, I discovered that November has arrived, nine days later than the calendared date. I see it in the mo-

IN THE COUNTRY

tionless whity-gray sky, the wet black roofs, the smoke, which does not rise, but when it is feebly pushed out at the chimney-tops hangs there, as if it wished to go back again where it's warm, and then droops and smudges over the houses and snuggles down into the warm canyons of the streets. Now, having observed that November is outside, I smell it and hear it also, hissing in the radiators. And I recognize that there will be snow flying in a couple of weeks, the shut-in season will be upon us, and there will be no more driving to *fêtes champêtres* through scarlet maples; but men with nice, companionable wives in big country houses in Boone County will draw in to the open fire and read and drink tea and work out cross-word puzzles in the delicious coseyness of a *solitude à deux*; and I—I shall be living alone in solitary quarters in a great heedless city, where I might die to-morrow without bringing a tear into one of its twelve million eyes.

However, it's an ill wind, etc. Mr. Bidwell said to me only yesterday that "publishers always pray for a rainy autumn and an early and hard winter." To keep the wolves of self-pity and envy from my door I shall probably

LETTERS TO A LADY

do a lot of reading in these next months; it's the bachelor's best substitute for a wife. From November till late in the spring the literate are the privileged class; after that it is probably agreeable to be a yachtsman or an aviator. Even Boone County doesn't attract me very much in the winter except for the joy of an undisturbed hibernation with books.

Before you and Jim joined us, I used to brag that a single man could get on well enough by himself if he had four friends—a stick, a pipe, a fire and a book. Some people would add a dog; but, in my experience, a dog's eyes ask too much. If you must have a live animal, a cat is better; she has no soul, and so she doesn't suffer from the inattention of an absent-minded man, as I know a dog does, and as I suppose a wife would. Only I happen to hate cats from fear that I shall step on them in the cellarway. But a pipe nestling against one's tongue gives the same sort of friendly warmth as a cat dozing against one's leg; and a crackling fire on the hearth at night is company enough for a man who wants no more of his companion than a pleasant, continuous, unexacting chatter, under cover of which he can pursue his own

IN THE COUNTRY

thoughts, as I imagine husbands must do when their wives run on past all the stops. The immense superiority of a conversational fire to a conversational wife is that whenever you are tired of the fire's chatter you can, without impoliteness, stick your nose in a book.

You see I'm not prejudiced against wives, but am desperately calling up all the best ways to get along without one. Yet how does one explain that some of the greatest readers are married men? That troubles me. I know wedded lawyers, doctors, and even realtors more addicted to Shakespeare and Balzac and infinitely better acquainted with current literature than many young professors who pretend to teach these things. Perhaps their passion for letters is due to their not *having* to read—to its being a pleasure unspoiled by any bread-and-butter utility. Or possibly, just possibly, they read, some of them, as a means of retreating from their wives and children!

I make this horrid addition because I once knew a middle-aged lawyer in Chicago who practically obtained a separation from his wife with the help of his library, converting it into a kind of little private Reno. All day he spent

LETTERS TO A LADY

in the city in diligent litigation. When he went home he passed an hour in his yard watering his lawn. Then he ate his dinner with his wife and four daughters, like a good citizen. But promptly at 7:30 he withdrew into what in his old-fashioned way he called his "den," at the top of the house, and there, in a dense atmosphere of stogie smoke absolutely impenetrable to women, he read and discussed books—all the old books and most of the new ones—with his men friends till 12 or 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. I have never known a more impassioned book-lover. But are all middle-aged and elderly married men who stay at home nights like that? I wonder.

I suspect I've been reciting some of the reasons why so many women of the old school hate books, infrequently mention them, seldom read them, and absolutely never buy one. They are jealous of them. They regard them as interlopers. For example, I met the other day a Columbia faculty man who says that he doesn't know one of his colleagues who dares to have a new book sent to his home address. They all, he declares, have new-book purchases delivered at their offices. From there they

IN THE COUNTRY

gradually smuggle them into their homes and carefully hide them among the classics on their bookshelves. Then, if their wives happen to catch them "with the goods on them," reading, say, a novel like "The White Monkey" or "The Green Hat," and cry out, "Why, Luke, when did you buy *that*?" they reply, with studious innocence and nonchalance, not even looking up from their reading, "This? Oh, I've had this for ages. Haven't you noticed it, Mary? It's been right here on the shelves since I don't know when."

This same Columbia man—Luke Wanhope his name is—tells me that in lecturing among the women's clubs over a considerable period of years in the New England hinterland he finds far more women than formerly who wish to appear to have read something. But he thinks it indubitable that most of them still make it a point of honor never to read a book if they have to buy it. If they can't get hold of the copy in the town library, which is usually the only one in town, of anything later than Cowper's "Poems" or Thomson's "Seasons," they postpone the club's "study" of it till another year. He had an amusing story about a

LETTERS TO A LADY

club of a hundred women, including wives of all the local bankers and prosperous leading citizens, who were getting up a “conversation meeting” on a contemporary poet—Elinor Wylie—but had to give up their programme and got into a terrible row because by the time the first fifty of them had read the borrowed copy of the first edition of “Nets to Catch the Wind,” which they were circulating, they had worn it to tatters, and the owner, the husband of one of them, didn’t think the note of apology sent to him by the secretary of the club was adequate compensation.

I hope this won’t remind you too bitterly of the Monday Club and the time they gave up “studying” “Plays for Puritans” because the minister had it “out,” and took up “The Good-Natured Man” for the winter’s reading because there were two copies in the library.

Wanhope tells me, however, that city women, especially the younger set, do read books, and that he knows three women who are actually collecting them. With you, that makes four that I have heard of. Wanhope says that reading women are now quite the thing; he regards it as part of the “sex-equality” movement.

IN THE COUNTRY

Since you took a stunning library with you when you migrated to Boone County, it is clear that reading must have been "in" before you left New York. In our town I think you were the first woman who had more than a dozen books of her own—books which she had actually chosen and collected for herself. How I envy you the space you have, in that big house, to expand your collection! That must be one of the high satisfactions of being an intelligent Lady in the Country—with unlimited credit in the Louisville bookstores. When I think of myself and my friends here, most of whom are poor devil poets living in a bedroom and kitchen cabinet in Greenwich Village, and piling their one-volume Pepys and their one-volume Boswell on the washstands and under the beds, and then when I think of your assembling all those gorgeous new books and magnificent two-yards-long-collective-and-subscription editions of modern authors as fast as they come out—things that we poor devils can only gape at in the show windows, why then I hope—I can only hope—that nothing will happen to Jim which will prove me any more devotedly

PAUL.

LETTERS TO A LADY

NEW YORK,
Nov. 23, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

I seem to have a "stem" this morning in the statement that Americans in Paris are getting ready for Thanksgiving. Do you know what a stem is? It is any little tuft of fact that happens to stick up and catch the eyes of two—or, at the most, three—good friends who want to have a talk. They take hold of it as if it were a bit of wild morning-glory and try to pull it up; but they find that the roots of it run all through their experience. It is very good fun. I'll show you. Paris—Thanksgiving—gratitude: There, the stem already juts out!

In the ship last summer coming home from Paris I noticed that a certain young woman, who knew that she was not difficult to contemplate, came in to dinner each evening in a different and a more inspiringly beautiful gown than she had worn the evening before. A sea trip would have monotonous hours if human nature found nothing to engage its keenest faculties, and by the time we had reached mid-ocean, our table, putting one and one together, had firmly established these facts: The young woman was studying art in Paris; she was trav-

IN THE COUNTRY

elling alone; she was going on a two weeks' visit to her parents in Minnesota.

When this news came out, one of those bald-headed, spectacled, blinking fellows that we all took for a professor because he always went through the ten courses and his bottle of sour ship's wine as if he had never had anything before but peanuts and water—this fellow lifted his nose from his hors-d'œuvre and exclaimed: “Good Lord! And a new dress every day for a ship's load of strangers! Milton was right. That's the way women are. Pure vanity—‘not to be trusted, longing to be seen, though by the devil himself!’” Instantly a college boy, a freshman from Amherst, shot back at him across the tables: “You are off! She would dress like that, to please herself, if there weren't another soul on board. I'm darn glad she does!” And so was I.

Where do we go from there? Well, we remember promptly that women are not all like that, because a New England woman has just written me an indignant letter about my having made fun over what she calls “the very modest way in which women's clubs are obliged to conduct their literary programmes.” It is

LETTERS TO A LADY

an interesting letter. She says: "In our little town there are probably five or six women with ample means to live very well indeed—to buy what books we like, to dress as we please, to drive to the city and see a play once or twice a week and to entertain one another lavishly, if we desire. But if we set a standard according to our means, nine-tenths of our neighbors would just be 'out of it.' We are very democratic here. We, and our husbands, too, are proud of preserving here the old-fashioned, simple community feeling, which disappears in envy and bitterness and embarrassment the moment that one person overawes the others by being obviously better off and starts up a competition which the others can't afford to enter. Clearly, sir, you don't know your Emerson, or you would remember that fine passage in the essay on 'Heroism' about 'the asceticism which common good nature would appoint to those who are at ease and in plenty, in sign that they feel a brotherhood with the great multitude of suffering men.' If we, who can afford them, deny ourselves books and plays and expensive food and clothes and live just as the others do, we do it gladly, like a little band, so

IN THE COUNTRY

to speak, of Samurai; and we are sure it makes for good feeling."

O Caroline, Caroline, there is the explanation of Mrs. Jonathan Clarke: she is one of the Samurai! You know her, don't you? I'm sure she's in the Monday Club. Don't you love her? Mrs. Jonathan and her husband—both sides—are two of the wealthiest people in Boone Co. They live in the same stuffy old house that his grandfather built during the Civil War; and I don't think it has been renovated since, though they have put in running water. There isn't a comfortable chair in it, nor a piece of upholstery that isn't in rags. I can't recall a single picture except a crayon drawing of Grandfather Clarke, and "Christ in the Temple," and three or four old photographs of the children. I'll *swear* there aren't any books but the family Bible, an ancient encyclopædia, Longfellow's Poems, Cowper in a green silk birthday edition, Beecher's Sermons, some bound numbers of "The Water-Cure Magazine," "The Phrenological Review" and "Universal Family Medicine." They are both so afraid of overawing the community that they are the worst-dressed family in town, the worst fed and

LETTERS TO A LADY

the least educated. Further to spare the feelings of the neighbors, Mrs. Clarke employs no help and Jonathan keeps well toward the foot of any subscription list that is circulating. If they should ask you to dinner, be sure to eat something before you go; for she is certain to serve you a starvation ration, murmuring the while, "We live simply here, Jonathan and I, now that the children are gone"—poor little undernourished rats! Oh, yes, and tell Jim to take his own cigars with him; he won't be able to smoke Jonathan's. And they have oodles of money—just oodles of it.

I'm a poor man, and always shall be. Do I envy Clarke his money? No, of course not; no one does. But suppose he spent it like a gentleman and a good fellow? Should I envy him then? All the radical theories about property seem to be based on the assumption that the distinction between More and Less is tragical to those who have less. "How," asks Emerson, to whom that New England lady has sent me, "How can Less not feel the pain; how not feel indignation or malevolence toward More?"

There is Theophilus Jeffrey, a very efficient

IN THE COUNTRY

man in Thorpe, Bidwell & Co. He lives like a lord on an estate on Long Island, commanding the Atlantic—just the sort of estate that a man of imagination would choose for himself. He has a charming wife and five children with talents on all their fingers. He has a fluent pen and a ready wit, and the verse that he tosses off for his friends is, I am afraid, better than what I am sending around to the publishers. He has a most genial disposition, and a demure, elfish humor that reminds one of Chaucer—without his beard. Besides all that, he is a handsome man, “a puppet in the waist for to embrace.”

Do I envy him? No. I am grateful to him, just as I have always been to you and Jim. I am grateful to him for having imagination and energy enough to make his life interesting to himself and to others. And what strikes me, as I pull away at our “stem,” is that *most* people are like that; and that explains my economic theory, what there is of it. I mean that the actual emotion which most people feel in the presence of great energy, fine talent, success and beauty is not envy at all, but pure gratitude, which is one of the most delightful

LETTERS TO A LADY

of emotions. Perhaps I am deficient in what is often considered the more elementary passion; for in the entire course of my thirty years I can't recall feeling envy as a pain but once, and that was when I was a small boy and wished I were on the ball team. I'm not sure that gratitude is a virtue and envy a vice. I have often wished for envy, prayed for it, believing that it might act as a useful spur to the sides of my intent. But I don't feel it, simply never feel it, never have felt it. When Jeffrey showed me his place the other day I said to him: "This is very lovely, Mr. Jeffrey. It is so lovely that it fills me with gratitude, like the sight of Mr. Morgan's library, and like the golden horses and horsemen leaping at the sun from the columns of the Alexander Bridge in Paris."

Now, here's where you take the stem. Are women like that or not?

PAUL.

NEW YORK,
Nov. 30, '24.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Every time one tells the truth one utters something shocking. Try it sometime! Since I knew perfectly well that you and Jim were keen about the elections, it *was* rather nasty

IN THE COUNTRY

for me to say that on Election Day I wished I were squirrel-hunting by the Ohio. But that was the truth. I feel about American politics just now as Walt Whitman felt about religion:

“And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
For I, who am curious about each, am not curious
about God;
(No array of terms can say how much I am at
peace about God, and about death.)

My feeling about politics is all derived from my experience with the Saturday Walking Stick Club of Boone County—the best club I ever belonged to. Early in the history of that organization its members exploded “the fallacy of popular government.” We ascertained that popular government was possible but inconvenient: it took all your time, it didn’t get you anywhere, and there wasn’t any fun in it. That, by the way, is the reason that sensible men nowadays who have got something worth while on their minds are turning over the government of such States as Texas to women.

Our club was organized to obtain for each member the maximum amount of walking, swimming, paddling and roasting steak and

LETTERS TO A LADY

onions under the summer stars. On our first expedition we learned that under popular government we should spend most of our Saturdays wrangling about how, when and where to go. On our next trip, by a simple eeny-meeny-meiny-mo process, we elected a "dictator" for the day. We clothed him from head to foot in our abdicated wills. Though he might happen to be the worst egghead among us, he ruled us for the day with an unquestioned rod of iron. He announced where we were to meet, what we were to bring, where we were going, at what point we should ford the river and at what point camp was to be made. He said: "Harry, you make the fire. Tom and Dick, bring up wood. Bill, fry the steak. Killop, boil the coffee. Roger, slice the onions. And, Paul, you hike up the hill and fetch water from the spring."

At first we tried to work out the elections so that the egghead wouldn't get the dictatorship; but presently we saw that was the best job we could give him; in any other position he might do serious damage—burn the steak or spill the coffee. Some of us were political radicals at the outset and awfully fond of pa-

IN THE COUNTRY

laver. But to-day every man in that club knows the rudiments of sound political government. Every one knows that a conscientious and fully authorized dictator insures the largest freedom for realizing the essential object of the expedition. Every man in the club is a democrat in religion and a Fascist in politics.

Do you know that fellow Haldeman-Julius out in Girard, Kan., who runs a sort of culture-volcano, belching little 10-cent blue books of the world's masterpieces of literature and science in millions on millions all over the Middle West? What political dreams he may have entertained in his youth I don't know; but at present his master-purpose seems to be to put a copy of the "Apology of Socrates" into the pocket of every man, woman, and child in the Mississippi Valley. I haven't seen any of the campaign literature that makes better reading or that is likely to make better men.

Well, this Haldeman-Julius, who appears to be one of the new brand of disillusioned radicals, has just published in his Bulletin a saucy editorial about the elections, in which he calls on us all to "get down on our knees and thank the Holy Ghost that we have such a President

LETTERS TO A LADY

in the White House" as will cause us to "cease expecting government, by some mysterious hocus-pocus, to make us paragons of virtue, arbiters of taste, receivers of manna from heaven." Then he runs on like this: "If you can't have a perfect blank at the head of the state, then by all means have a monarchy such as the English enjoy so wholesomely, for over there the Prince of Wales is not expected to make a living for his subjects, but merely to decide on how their coats shall be shaped, how many buttons on the vest and whether there shall be a flower in the lapel or a colored hand-kerchief in the outside pocket. That is as it should be."

What he is getting at, of course, is that a government which runs along so smoothly and quietly that you hardly notice it, a government which makes no pretense of looking after the spiritual salvation of the individual, and which reminds him as seldom as possible that he is a political animal—such a government leaves the individual free to look for happiness and satisfaction where there is some prospect of finding them; in self-culture, in the various forms of creative activity, in making a decent human

IN THE COUNTRY

living, and in passionate devotion to science, letters and the arts. His political feeling thus resembles that of the Prince of Wales, who, it is rumored, when he contemplates the nuisance of kingship, is seriously tempted to "let George do it." The Kansas man's special enthusiasm is for realizing the dream of which H. G. Wells has talked so much—to transform public opinion, to civilize the masses wholesale, by subjecting them to a regular Nile-inundation of modern ideas and emotions from a cheap press. The "hope of the world," he believes, is the culture of the individual. I must give you one of his paragraphs in which you can recognize how "safe," for the present, this Kansas brand of radicalism is, with its realistic and popular Epicurean note:

Suppose we were to establish utopia. What will it avail if the men and women who are to live in that utopia are ignorant and foolish and lazy and worthless? We will have to start over again, beginning with each individual. So why not begin now? Let each man find his own utopia. Culture can make each life beautiful and noble to-day. And to-day is the important day for us; to-morrow we die. We live too briefly. We cannot pin our faith in some political miracle that will work a hundred

LETTERS TO A LADY

years from now. We must live to-day. Granting there is much wrong with the world, let us try our best to get the most out of life that we possibly can, despite the world's wrongs. If a sufficient number of men were to become civilized, cultured, understanding—if they were to become individuals instead of cogs—the world would improve in proportion to the forward steps they took as individuals. Meanwhile, we should be enjoying life, living with the truly great, the noble poets and philosophers and thinkers and discoverers; with the inspired leaders, with the gay wits and the happy lovers. Life is to be lived to-day, not in some remote utopia. Live it now—to the full. And the best way to live it completely is through culture. Culture is the answer to the man who would enjoy life.

Now, the ordinary objection to the life of culture is that it is such a bore—like your Monday Club, Caroline! So that one turns wearily from it to politics, where there is, at least, a fight. That is what always makes me so grateful to any man who gets up an excitement that isn't political.

Curiously enough, I have just been kindled to an ardor of interest in the non-political life by hearing William Beebe talk in our Town Hall last night. Our Town Hall, by the way, is something like King Arthur's Round Table:

IN THE COUNTRY

Knights come in and relate what exciting adventures they have had in all parts of the world.

William Beebe sauntered in, long and lank and brown and bald, with his little black mustache, looking like a brother of Rossita Forbes, that spear-shaped African traveller. In the most nonchalant fashion he began to talk to us about a land where they shoot poisoned arrows at you after the sun goes down. He had been photographing pheasants in some out-of-the-way corner betwixt China, Thibet and Burma. He told us that, since one could now travel 200 miles an hour through the air, the earth was shrinking, relatively, to the dimensions of an "astral pill." In order to discover anything new nowadays, one had to look rather sharp, and press close up to the reality of things, put spectacles on monkeys, feed thyroid extract to the South American sloth—a treatment suggested by its close mental resemblance to the human moron, and, in one way and another, find fresh points of view.

We were a little alarmed at first for fear he would say that the interest of the natural world is nearly played out; but quite needlessly. He has found out new ways of looking at things.

LETTERS TO A LADY

He settles down on a square yard of earth and discovers 1,500 organisms. He establishes the relation of islands to the mainland by studying the lice on a bird's wings. He brings out his marvellous slides and moving pictures, and takes us up and down a waterfall five times as high as Niagara, or shows us a colony of leaf-cutting ants, busy as the builders of Carthage, cutting down and carting off a morning-glory leaf in segments that flap in the wind like the sails of a fishing-fleet.

It was one of the best "shop talks" I ever heard; and all the best talk in the world is "shop." It made me very keen to read his last book, "*Galápagos: World's End.*" All the girls who hear him talking about vampire bats cry: "Here's a new career for women!" and threaten to volunteer for a job in his Guiana laboratory. You'd better not apply. I hear all the positions are full. But, Caroline, as a book collector you have a fault: you go in too exclusively for poetry and fiction. Start a science shelf; buy "*Galápagos.*" If you could hear William Beebe talk, you would swear that fiction can't hold a candle to reality. From one direction and another our chemistry and physics and biology in these

IN THE COUNTRY

days are abolishing the idea of dead matter. There isn't anything dead any longer. It is all coming alive. In the most exciting fashion! Didn't we read in the papers just the other day that some fellow has got atomic energy by the tail and may pull it out of its burrow this winter? And then there will be power enough in the atoms of a penknife to drive the Berengaria from here to England. What do fellows who can do things like that care about who is elected?

PAUL.

DEAR CAROLINE:

NEW YORK,
Dec. 14, '24.

What the young people here in the city are all talking about is "personal culture" as a kind of substitute for politics, religion, a standardized education and other things that they detest—such as hard work, for example. I have always believed that hatred of hard work was the only serious barrier between women's clubs and usefulness; and so I was glad to hear that the programme committee of the Monday Club has decided to investigate the suppression of books! I hope it will pursue the investigation boldly among its own membership. If you

LETTERS TO A LADY

want the latest arguments you will find most of them in the recently published report of a debate held in our Town Hall, between Mr. John S. Sumner, of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice—which is often thought to be identical with current literature—and Mr. Ernest Boyd, a literary critic who habitually dips his pen in caustic. The pamphlet is called “Censorship of Literature,” and is to be had of the League for Public Discussion.

But if you want my own reaction to the questions involved I will tell you what I do whenever, as sometimes happens, I become thoroughly disgusted with one of the new books and wish that it had died before birth: I take down my copy of “The Little Flowers of St. Francis” and read the ninth chapter. The great superiority, by the way, of St. Francis over Epictetus, who is said to have been a favorite of the late Mayor Gaynor, is this: while Epictetus helps one to bear the wickedness and beauty of this city, St. Francis helps one to love them—both. If you don’t own “The Little Flowers” do get a copy for your shelf of spiritual friends, with Giotto’s illustrations preferably.

IN THE COUNTRY

The ninth chapter tells of an experience that St. Francis and Brother Leone had on one occasion when they had no books from which to say divine office. They invented a little spiritual exercise in which, however, God interfered. As it was originally conceived, the Saint was to begin thus: "O Brother Francis, thou hast done much evil and hast committed so many sins in the world that thou art worthy of hell." And Brother Leone, without altering a word, was to reply: "It is very true thou art worthy of hell." With the simplicity of a dove, says the record, Brother Leone consented to his condemnatory part in this exercise and bade his comrade begin in the name of God. I will quote you a short passage, showing how an invisible power altered the words which came from the good brother's lips.

St. Francis began thus: "O Brother Francis, thou hast done so much evil and hast committed so many sins in the world that thou art worthy of hell." And Brother Leone answered: "God will work so much good through thee that thou wilt certainly go to heaven." "Do not speak thus, Brother Leone," said St. Francis, "but when I say, 'Brother Francis, thou

LETTERS TO A LADY

hast committed so many iniquities against God that thou art worthy to be cursed by Him' thou shalt answer thus: 'Yes, indeed, thou art worthy to be numbered among the cursed.'" And Brother Leone answered: "Most willingly, O my father." Then St. Francis, striking his breast, cried with a loud voice: "O Lord of heaven and earth, I have committed against Thee so many sins that I deserve to be cursed by Thee." And Brother Leone answered: "O Brother Francis, the Lord will cause thee to be singularly blessed among the blessed."

It isn't easy, perhaps, for the imagination to accustom itself to thinking of, say, D. H. Lawrence, or Dreiser, or Cabell in the rôle of the blessed St. Francis; but whenever I reflect on the iniquitous works of these fellows I find it easy to slip into the rôle of Brother Leone. I'll give you an illustration. In 1921 there was published a book, "Simon Called Peter," by an English clergyman, suppressed in some cities, by consent of the booksellers, as containing matters unsuitable to be presented to the minds of boys and virgins. In running through the book, under the fresh stimulus of Messrs. Sumner and Boyd, in order to discover the head

IN THE COUNTRY

and front of the peccancy which caused it to be sold from under the counter, I have come upon a passage which is as “dangerous” as anything in it. Yet it is a passage full of simplicity, sincerity, truth, and that “sad lucidity of soul” which we used to think such a fine thing in a certain eminent Victorian. It is this statement of what the war did to a clerical mind:

I thought I knew what would save souls. But I find that I can't because my methods are—I don't know, faulty perhaps, out of date maybe, possibly worse; and, what is more, the souls don't want my saving. The Lord knows they want something; I can see that fast enough, but what it is I don't know. Heavens! I remember preaching in the beginning of the war from the text “Jesus had compassion on the multitude.” Well, I don't feel that He has changed, and I'm quite sure He still has compassion, but the multitude doesn't want it. I was wrong about the crowd. It's nothing like what I imagined. The crowd isn't interested in Jesus any more. It doesn't believe in Him. It's a different sort of crowd altogether from the one He fed.

There you are: “It's a different sort of crowd from the one He fed.” That is the first thing that a new St. Francis would discover! It is a different sort of crowd, with far more complicated hungers, as St. Francis would quickly

LETTERS TO A LADY

perceive if he lived in New York and read current fiction and poetry !

He wouldn't? Yes, he would. He would want to find out what this desirous crowd had in mind. When I first came to your beloved city in my Boone County simplicity I failed to see much but a kind of unpromising post-war spirit of disillusion and anarchy, bred in minds dog-tired of preachers and politicians, but still secretly mulling over their disappointment with the objectives attained in the big political and religious drive, started in August, ten years ago. I began analyzing the discontents of the crowd, but before I had gone far I saw that each discontent was the negative end of an affirmation something like this: (1) Discontent with chaos, or the desire for form; (2) discontent with the second-rate, or the desire to excel; (3) discontent with being a bore, or the desire to give pleasure; (4) discontent with the ugly, or the desire to be beautiful; (5) discontent with lethargy, or the desire for excitement; (6) discontent with the inarticulate, or the desire to be expressive; (7) discontent with mere existence, or the desire to be happy. The seven-branched candlestick of the new humanism!

IN THE COUNTRY

Now, you asked me in a recent letter whether I think politicians and preachers are “played out.” No, indeed. What I think is that they will be a little in abeyance until they can persuade the crowd that the State and the Church can feed these desires better than you and I, Caroline, can do, working by ourselves.

PAUL.

NEW YORK,

Jan. 4, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

The first week in the new year is a good time to clear our minds of cant! You pretend—and perhaps I encouraged you—that we are all at sea, “darkness is upon the face of the deep”—your exact words!—and you are anxious about Tony’s education, from fear that when he is of age to receive instruction there will be nothing left, established and unchallengeable, to teach him. I confess my ignorance of infant education, to be sure; but, thank heaven, I’m a scholar, even if I am not a parent; and if I haven’t the information in my head, at least I know where to turn for it. There are always Dr. Holt and Dr. Samuel Johnson, and Heywood Broun. Holt and Broun prescribe out of

LETTERS TO A LADY

a profound experience, and I have forgotten what they say. But if an infant were left on my doorstep I shouldn't hesitate to treat it as Johnson's gigantic common sense suggested: "I would make a shed on the roof and take it there for fresh air. I should feed it, and wash it much, and with warm water to please it, not with cold water to give it pain."

"Boswell—But, Sir, does not heat relax?

"Johnson—Sir, you are not to imagine the water to be very hot. I would not *coddle* the child."

"What does this story teach us, children?" Why, simply that there are certain fixed elements in nature and in man which determine our conduct and insure a measure of stability and continuity in our principles, in spite of the shifting winds of doctrine. For example, one can always depend upon it that children will be dirty, that water will be wet and that men will be reasonable!

The final check on every form of eccentricity and scepticism and anarchy and on every pretense that laws and morals are mere opinions —the check is felt at last in the form of necessity fixed in the constitution of human society

IN THE COUNTRY

and its environment. That partly answers your other interesting question whether "virtue is what it used to be 400 years before our era." But I will tell you a very interesting specific way to get at an answer to the question for yourself.

Mr. Miles Menander Dawson, a literary lawyer in our town—I mean in New York—has made a book which much pleases me, called "The Ethics of Socrates" (Putnam). He has collected and classified the Socratic ethical and religious teachings, or ideas, rather—since Socrates disliked being thought of as a professor; he has brought the leading ideas together under nineteen headings, such as "Virtue Is Obedience to Reason," "Science, the Basis of Ethics"; "The Highest Good," "Education," "Ethical Value of the Fine Arts," "Duties as a Citizen," "Rights and Duties of Women," "Duties Toward Friends," "Self," and "Death." Under each heading, besides the extracted pensées from Plato and Xenophon, he has added parallel or derivative thoughts from Aristotle, Cicero, Lucretius, Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, etc.

I don't know any sort of book that pleases

LETTERS TO A LADY

me more—up to a certain point. What people think and feel about all these commonplace topics is, after all, when you sift it down, pretty nearly the most interesting thing about people—if one has just a little taste for people! Our modern essay-writing began, I believe, in about that way; that is, by an industrious transcribing into note-books of the wisdom of the ancients by fellows like Montaigne and Bacon. After they had collected what the classical moralists thought on all the great themes, they industriously digested it. Then they went a step farther; the humanistic essayists from Montaigne to Emerson did what you propose that I should do: they compared the wisdom of the ancients with the manners and customs of their own times and subjected it also to the “acid test” of their own experience. Mr. Dawson hasn’t done that. Or, rather, he hasn’t published the *results* of his comparison! I wish that he had.

For the soundest and “meatiest” moralists we have are men who have gone through just these processes of diligent collection and honest realistic comparison with a wide modern experience. One of the men, by the way, that I

IN THE COUNTRY

most wish to meet before I die is a correspondent of mine in Kentucky, a country doctor, who through forty years "in the wilderness" has steadily been comparing the data of a physician's practice with the wisdom of India. It delights me immensely to know that there are such people!—lawyers and business men here in the city, doctors and teachers and ministers in lonely parishes, and even a farmer here and there in a lonely grange, and a farmer's wife, like you, Caroline, mulling over the sacred books of the East, Confucius, the Platonic Dialogues. Thoreaus and Emersons emerge from that sort of background in America.

But I haven't answered your question yet: Is virtue what it used to be 400 years before our era? Your question sent me to Dawson and he—which proves *his* virtue—sent me to Plato and Xenophon. Every time any one, with a breath of enthusiastic conviction, praises a chapter in Marcus Aurelius or a dialogue in Plato or an essay in Montaigne or even a chapter in the Hebrew Bible or a passage in Shakespeare, I am very likely to read it over again—just as I read over my own poems when, as happens, alas, more infrequently, some one has praised

LETTERS TO A LADY

them. Somehow, you know, every one who praises a classic with gusto has good luck, raises the dead, creates a new atmosphere around him, in which he acquires new values. And I spent a good part of the Christmas holidays in a blissful trance reading the "Apology," "Crito," "Phaedo," and "The Symposium" through your eyes.

I don't know how Socrates would get on with Tony or any child of the cradle age. Socrates was a man who rather liked a quiet time. We haven't any satisfactory account of his home life. We can't say with much assurance how well his theory that a man should never lose his temper worked in the bedroom and at the breakfast table. But we do know that at the end of his life he had to send his wife out of the room in order to avoid an emotional scene at just the time when he was attempting to leave the world and all his friends in a mood of almost superhumanly sweet reasonableness. And we do know that, like many of the perfectly urbane men one meets in New York, he spent most of the daylight and the better part of the evening "downtown," and thus interposed perhaps "a veil of divine illusion" be-

IN THE COUNTRY

tween the world and his “domestic problem.” So that even in that respect virtue nowadays is what it used to be 400 years before our era.

But what I think is this: If I were the parent of, not an infant in arms, but of a boy of college age, with the omnivorous, inquisitive, aweless and rather arrogant temper exhibited by many young fellows of our time, I should not send him to Yale or Harvard if there were the slightest chance of his being able to crowd into a circle where Socrates was talking. Why? Because I believe that by keeping company with Socrates he would stand a better chance of developing an affection for all the essential human virtues than he would have on any of the academic playgrounds of this generation, with their undefined aims, their imperfect means, their inadequate teaching personalities and the confusing multiplicity of the “environmental” pressures. Since 400 B. C. morals have changed continuously; they are changing now, though, I believe, not fast enough; but virtues, so far as I can make out, have hardly changed a hair since Socrates talked in Athens. I hope to goodness your Tony will react against our morals: a great part of them is not worth sav-

LETTERS TO A LADY

ing; but I hope he won't react against our virtues, for he will need them all when he is cast ashore on his desert island, and the old crew, you and Jim and I, have gone down to feed the fishes.

As you frequent Socrates you know that he would clear away half the difficulties that clutter our present scene by making a distinction between morals and virtues, just as, for example, Jesus did, with less logical apparatus, when he remarked to the people on whose Sabbatharian toes he had trod: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Socrates, refusing to evade the law, by his death proved his deep aversion to civic disobedience, his profound respect for law even in the face of a bad law. But the main energy of Socrates was devoted to the discussion neither of law nor of morals, but of virtues.

He never made New Year's resolutions like this: (1) To attend church every Sunday; (2) To walk every day at 4; (3) To smoke only after dinner; (4) To eat no meat on Friday; (5) To read some improving book every evening after dinner. Socrates knew that people differed and always would differ about the im-

IN THE COUNTRY

portance of such practical details of conduct as those resolutions cover. And so he refrained from making reason identical with the acceptance of any dogma, or religion identical with the acceptance of any creed, or self-control identical with abstinence from any particular variety of fish.

We, on the other hand, constantly do that sort of thing—I mean identify our own particular morals with virtue and our own particular creeds with religion. And so we are always working up an excitement over the irreverence toward God, government, law and morals exhibited by our children, when as a matter of fact their “revolt” is inspired by their virtues, and is directed against the badness of our morals, our law, our government and our God. Virtue to-day means, just as it did 400 years before our era, the use of the reason in the pursuit of happiness, commanding beautiful objects and receiving them into the soul, fearing the things that should be feared, loving truth and justice, self-control, courage, kindness, a sort of gay serenity—the “natural rhythm of a manly and well-regulated life.”

LETTERS TO A LADY

Many of the disciples of Socrates, like many of the disciples of Jesus, attempted to express his virtues in a transmissible moral code. They missed a good part of them; and that is why those who live by rule rather than by virtue are so miserable. More of this anon.

PAUL.

NEW YORK,
Jan. 11, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

It seems silly to talk about the weather and the trivial little things that one does every day. Gladstone didn't! George Eliot didn't! I doubt if Herbert Spencer did—at least I can't remember any weather around him. But haven't you noticed that just as soon as you and I forget to mention the homely things, such as pancakes for breakfast and indigestion for supper, just as soon as we get high and mighty in our letters, discussing really serious topics, like Socrates and education, you and I begin to dwindle, and become such colorless, tangless, vague little voices that there is nothing left to *correspond* with. All the companionableness drops out, and a voice out of a good phonograph seems warm, ruddy and sympathetic by comparison.

IN THE COUNTRY

I know the sages tell us that as one's spiritual development approaches perfection one becomes less and less personal. But, Caroline, let's you and me, if that's the case, approach perfection just as slowly as possible.

I've been lonely and chilly this last week, and I want you to feel my weather! And put a little Kentucky sunshine into it! It's heavily gray here, and we've just had out of the north what Horace B. Liveright would call a "devastating" snow-storm—eleven inches at a fall, the weather man said, and eleven *feet* by my own observation in the street around the corner. There was a blockade by stalled cars, of course, and in some places it was so hopeless that drivers abandoned them, leaving the motors running—or just resignedly let them freeze. Fiammetta went out to view the confusion, and observing the spellbound traffic blocking Varick Street from curb to curb and from King Street to the Battery, exclaimed: "What if there should be a fire!" Instantly, as on a well-managed stage, out dashed the engine, made a spirited run of one block and plumped up against the snow-bound traffic. Resourceful firemen, changing their habits, dart into the

LETTERS TO A LADY

subway; so reach the scene, and save the city. Some twelve thousand men are now engaged in scraping up the snow and casting it into the river.

Moral: It ought never to have fallen—the snow, I mean. It was a mistake. Snow in the country is a beautiful luxury and an enhancement of the scene, good for roofing cowsheds with “Carrara” and softening hard rails “to swan’s down,” as the rustic poets of New England point out; good for snowmen, sleighing, skiing, tobogganing; good for tracking deer under the spruces along the Sabbath-still ridges of the Green Mountains at 4 o’clock in the morning, with a bottle of hot coffee in your breast pocket and a stout pair of New England arctics with felt pacs to your feet. Yes, snow in the country, at the proper season, is unobjectionable and quite all right. But snow in a city like New York is not even ornamental—for it gets dirty and full of cinders, and there’s nothing more hideous than smudged ermine. Snow in a big modern city is a sheer impertinence. It is quite out of place. It hasn’t the slightest use or excuse, and so we dump it into the river just as fast as we can get it there.

IN THE COUNTRY

Do you know, I get a lot of comfort out of the way we meet the snow problem in New York? Snow is a very venerable "institution"—of, indeed, a hoary antiquity. It is one of the numerous things which we have long been wont to speak of as "ordained in the providence of God." It comes down to us sanctioned by the use and tolerance of immemorial generations. Nothing could be more obviously in the order of nature than snow. But, mark you, finding that snow is a regular monkey-wrench in the mechanism of a modern city, do we allow our city to be made a monkey of? Not at all. Without a moment's hesitation we "go against nature." We say, *Pereat nix.* We take radical measures. Twelve thousand husky fellows chuck it out as unceremoniously as if it were the mistake of an underbred kitten. It's an admirable example of virtue in action.

This brings us back to the "mutton" which we were discussing last Sunday. The point I was trying to make was this: Our virtues are our powers; our morals are the limitations which we impose upon our powers. Good morals are just the best known technic for enabling our virtues to cope with a given set of circumstances.

LETTERS TO A LADY

But when circumstances are profoundly altered, as they are by the watchlike complexity and hair-spring delicacy of adjustment characteristic of our modern civilization, then we have to fall back on our virtues and work out a new technic.

The great masters, like Socrates and Jesus and Raphael, always attack new sets of circumstances freshly and flexibly, with their virtues; but their disciples—and this is the tragedy of discipleship—are always approaching their problems stodgily, stiffly and fanatically, with an *enchiridion* in place of a luminous mind, a creed in place of a loving heart, a set of studio conventions in place of a discovering vision of unsuspected beauty in nature.

We mustn't allow ourselves to get too serious ! But just think for half a minute of what happened to the virtues of Socrates in the hands of his disciples. The incomparable virtues of Socrates were the blitheness and gaiety of a mind full of Greek sunlight and blue sky, a joyous and lucid superiority to circumstances, a gusto and enamoured eagerness in the things of the mind and in the daily quest of truth. Everything that he said and did convinces you

IN THE COUNTRY

of the reality of his happiness. But consider Diogenes showing his superiority to circumstances by showing his teeth in his tub, or the slave Epictetus devising a discipline to enable man to sidestep suffering and keep an icepack on his heart when his child dies, or poor Marcus Aurelius training himself to grin and bear being an emperor, or even Plato working up his master's joyous nonsense about an ideal city into a cast-iron set of laws for governing rabots.

Or think for just another half minute of the virtue of Jesus—of the absolutely simple and spontaneous way that tears came to his eyes, and his virtue went from him in healing and compassion and kindness and forgiveness and joy in the lilies of the field and a yearning and mother-like brooding over his city and tenderness for his beloved disciple and for women and children and in more abundant life for every one that he touched—life full of an inward sweetness; and then sit down and read for half an hour about some of the men burned at the stake to preserve the “purity” of Christian teaching: read Fox’s “Book of Martyrs,” or look into the latest heresy trial and see whether

LETTERS TO A LADY

our respectable creeds really contain all that is distinctive of Christian virtue.

In the new literature of these days it seems to me that one of the most interesting things to watch is the way the ancient human virtues insist on expressing themselves against the repressive weight of our morals and customs, like the irrepressible grass which in the spring thrusts up its fresh green expectancy between the cracked blocks of a cement sidewalk. The little story of Viola Meynell, which I sent you two weeks ago, is not a story about morals; it is a story about brutal customs and callous hearts—and about a very rare sort of virtue.

You'll be glad to know, by the way, that Socrates says it won't do to bring up children in the city, where they can observe the aberrations of the common rabble--and of their parents. He is perfectly clear that the place for Tony is in the country.

PAUL.

NEW YORK,

January 25, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

As I was coming in last night at a rather late hour I heard in a dark entrance a musical voice, with a ripple of laughter in it, lilting: "Don't

IN THE COUNTRY

argue with me, honey. Kiss me, if you want me to go!" Only that little melody out of the darkness of the doorway, gushing clear and sweet as the song of our Kentucky thrushes in the woods at nightfall. Whether the arguing shadow kissed the lilting shadow, and where they were going and why—and whether they ought to have gone, I don't know.

But it must have hummed to me in my sleep, that little tune; for I don't feel in the least like arguing with you this morning. I don't care in the least, just now, what you think about any of the things that we think about. What I wish to send you my silly pen can't get at. It isn't a thought, or I could think it out. It isn't exactly a mood, or I should ask you to play to yourself Guillmant's "Caprice," or I could telegraph to the florist to send you a bowl of China lilies. What I wish to communicate sounds, the moment I try translating it into words, terribly abstract: it's a *rhythm*, a certain *wave length*—and that's merely absurd. I guess, as John Synge says: "There is no tongue will tell to the Judgment Day what I feel in myself these times."

Do you remember a little piece of, I think,

LETTERS TO A LADY

Victor Hugo's which starts off something like this
—my memory and my French are both shaky:

“Sur le rêve angélique et tendre
Auquel vous songez en chemin,
Si vous n'avez rien à m'apprendre,
Pourquoi me pressez-vous la main?”

Which means: “If you are perfectly dumb and have absolutely nothing to say about the delightful dream in which you were lost on the way here, why do you squeeze my hand, why did you come at all?” Now, what do you suppose the young man replied to that?—if it was a young man. Did he repeat seventeen mortal times, like Christian in Rostand's play, “I love you”—that abominably hackneyed and wooden translation of the joyous rhythm of life? No, I don't think so. I believe he gave it up. I think he looked once at the tender mirth of her lips and once at the mocking mirth of her eyes and once at the petulant mirth of her little tapping foot, and then, I suspect, he began to argue, which is exactly what I am going to do with you.

In your last letter you chide me, mock at me, and call me a “moral Canute” for proposing to set aside an hour in the day “to count up one's blessings and whet one's awareness

IN THE COUNTRY

of them.” In the first place, you don’t state my idea correctly. The purpose of this hour of self-collection is to listen for one’s keynote and for the quiet little song one’s own spirit makes when it chimes with “the music of the spheres.”

Then you go on to argue that the spirit of felicity bloweth where and when it listeth, and comes to no man’s call. That is the common belief, but it isn’t true. The spirit of felicity is one of the most obedient creatures in the world to those who give the right call. It came a thousand nights running to attend on Maude Adams in the old days when she used to wave her handkerchief and ask all in the theatre who believed in fairies to wave with her. The spirit of felicity waits every day, as you know much better than I, on every musician and painter who has passed through the infernal torment of learning his art to serene mastery of it. Take Roland Hayes, for example, whom I heard the other night singing, like the angel Israfel, our old favorite, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve had.” The most exquisite shade of musical felicity was obedient to him, and he sent the very soul of it into the soul of every

LETTERS TO A LADY

one in Carnegie Hall and its four crowded galleries. He could perform the same miracle to-night and to-morrow night—but really this needs no arguing.

I suppose what you really meant is that ordinary people can have no command over their “blessings,” but must just blunder into them or miss them, as chance wills. But that isn’t true either, if you think of it. Our technic is awfully crude and traditional still; but we do recognize that there are certain definite means for reaching that part of our being which is capable of happiness. For example, ordinary people in Boone Co. are still practically sure to give themselves a good time when they go to a country dance. Here in the city the technic of social felicity is also, in certain circles, very thoroughly worked out: one, two, three—after the third cocktail, the stammering and the dumbness are said to cease and the party to swing into its rhythm:

“A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would,
we know.”

IN THE COUNTRY

You may not like this illustration—I don't myself; but as Browning remarks of the questionable tale in "The Statue and the Bust," it illustrates!

The notion that one can get on just as well without any technic is rank Protestantism and one of the grand errors of our Protestant upbringing. The reason why the Protestant churches give so little religious happiness is that most of them have discarded the technic for communicating with those elements in our nature which feel happiness.

Go into a Protestant church of a Sunday morning and you have no idea what is going to happen to you. All that you can be sure of, especially in the country, is that one of your fellow citizens is going to argue with you at great length, and whether he will put you "in tune with the Infinite" or send you home at odds with God and man, he knows as little as you. But enter a Roman Catholic service, especially in a Roman Catholic country, or walk quietly through the cathedral, and presently you find yourself slipping religiously into tune and, like old Sir Thomas Browne, almost ready to drop to your knees by the ancient crypts and shrines.

LETTERS TO A LADY

Why? Why?

Because the Roman Church preserves her marvellously comprehensive technic for conversing with the inarticulate; because she makes the quick senses help the groping mind; because she keeps and uses her images, her poetry, her pageants, her incense, her shadows and her mystery; and so, with subtle touches, beyond the power of all words, she gently releases the dream, *angélique et tendre*, locked in these hard hearts of ours.

What a curious notion, by the way, that the power which perfumes every rose in our gardens is incensed by incense! I made last summer a pilgrimage to Tintagel, by the gray Cornish sea, for Tristram and for Iseult's sake. Some fine dreams I had there, lying upon the swarded crags in a sun-warmed rabbit warren among the starry daisies and the wheeling gulls, amid the ruins of King Arthur's castle. But nothing in that romantic village impressed me more than—what do you suppose? A leaflet which I found in the ancient stone church on the hill above the castle—a leaflet by the local clergyman, a man much troubled by the younger generation, and so pleading earnestly for the

IN THE COUNTRY

restoration to the English Church of its right to the use of incense and any other time-honored means of stealing into the heart of youth through the enchanted senses.

I'm sick of this argument! Has there ever been a fascinating woman in the world from Iseult's time to yours who didn't study for at least an hour a day the technic of felicity? Has there been one who wouldn't have understood the full force of the clergyman's argument? You are a pack of hypocrites!

PAUL.

PINKVILLE, KENTUCKY,
February 1, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

What is it you write in your high philosophic cell near the top of Grant's Tomb—besides letters, with little preachments in them, to me? Of course you are in a position to observe and record all eclipses, celestial or literary, and thrill "when a new planet swims into your ken." Or don't you sometimes feel, when you look out over the smoking roofs, like a muezzin about to call the city to prayer? Send me one of your muezzin-calls and let me intone it to my too-impish thoughts, so that they will all

LETTERS TO A LADY

spread out their silken rugs and kneel and bow their heads and become dutiful again. Do you realize that you have never yet, since you have been in New York, sent me a poem of your own, wet from the pen?

Sometimes I fear me you are letting advertising smother poetry. The spirit seems to be in you of this age, when everything which used to be considered a gift of God can be learned in twelve easy lessons (write for our booklet at once)—everything, from “how to bake the kind of pies that mother used to make” to “how to write the kind of poetry Shelley used to write.” Now you come along and talk up a course in “how to be happy”—in twelve easy lessons! Paul! Paul!

Well, I should like to learn, for I am full of a dismal yearning to escape from Boone County. Last night I lay awake (I really must get out for more exercise, even in this downpour of rain), and I thought of a thousand things—of waterproof boots for Tony, of a menu for the most wearisome of dinner parties, of how to make Fanny remember to sweep under the beds, and—you know all the dreadful things one’s mind goes over at such a time.

IN THE COUNTRY

But you probably don't at all, for I suppose you spend your wakeful hours with Socrates and Ion or in sweet converse with St. Francis. Anyway, I lay there listening to the rain and wishing it would stop, when there came piercing through the drip of it, and through the drab procession of my thoughts, the sonorous whistle of a locomotive, mellowed and muted, perhaps, by the thick wet web of raindrops through which it had passed, sweeter to my ears than the call of your Kentucky thrushes. The sound came so suddenly, trailing with it suggestions of release, pictures of its fiery, serpentine length whipping through the darkness, and of the teeming, roaring, flaming cities for which it was bound—I am becoming flowery and “purple.” It is because of my fit of romantic melancholy. But that was a moment of felicity like those of which your last letter was so full, wasn't it? It came suddenly, however, and all unsought.

Well, I was still wakeful when the plantation bell began to toll. It is a daybreak sound I seldom bother to hear, but to-day it was so long and insistent that I got up and looked out of the window. The rain was only mist by then,

LETTERS TO A LADY

and between the sodden fields in the harsh cold morning light wound a procession of black folk behind a wagon drawn by an old dejected gray mule. Then I remembered that an old woman in an outlying corner of the place died yesterday. Of course they were on the way to the "buryin'" in the little graveyard beside their meeting-house. You remember the "buryin's," don't you? I dressed quickly and, booted and mackintoshed, waded out to watch. The preacher was just beginning: "We is now ready for the burial matrimonial." Then he went on to exhort and to mourn and to pray, in a jumble of words, which the crouching forms, rocking and moaning there in the mud, sometimes caught up into a song, wailing and mysterious—and beautiful, somehow.

I didn't stay it through, for it lasted hours, but I recognized that some of the newcomers on the plantation were chanting the loudest, and I suspected them of "dallying with beauty in the thick of sweet anguish," even of creating some of the anguish for the sake of the beauty, just as Gigli does when he sings "M'Appari" in the third act of "Martha." They were using your technic in the service of the spirit of felic-

IN THE COUNTRY

ity—harnessing trouble, like an old gray mule, to draw her chariot, so to speak. You see I'm not arguing, either, only agreeing with you, for I remember you once suggested this thought.

But I think that what you were really talking about last week was ecstasy, which differs from felicity in being so intimate with pain—pain either spread all through it or following closely on its heels. My locomotive whistle had it; it was part of the chiaroscuro of Roland Hayes's singing—I'm sure it was. Yes, and Iseult is a case in point, as well. The technic of the Roman Church which you mention would be hollow without its deeper than sensuous appeal to the emotions in the crucifix.

Another thing about ecstasy, which often makes unsuccessful even the best technic for securing it, is that while part of it is memory and familiarity and association, another part of it is swift surprise. To grope along a mountain in a cloud, with white and swirling mist hiding even the carpeting of primroses and forget-me-nots under foot, and then to see flash for an instant in a swiftly closing rift the sunny village, toylike and gleaming, miles below, is to feel a breath-taking moment of almost piercing

LETTERS TO A LADY

sweetness. But if the rift had been planned and the mist hadn't begun to close in almost as soon as it opened, blinder and more smothering after the flash, the edge of the delight would not have been so keen.

Speaking of surprises, isn't New York so full of them that she might well be called the city of ecstasy? They are crowded as closely together as the cells of a honeycomb. Do you sometimes step from an office doorway suddenly into a warm, glamorous dusk of gold light and purple shadow come over the city while you worked? Did you ever descend from the dingy "L" to find yourself gazing into a window full of Syrian mandolins and narghiles? Did you ever glance up from a muddy pavement, looking anxiously for traffic, and see at the end of the street a plume of steam on an apple-green sunset? But the thing that is sure to make me catch my breath is the unexpected sight of masts against the sky! Think of the possibilities in masts and plumes of steam!

There are no masts here, nor even the distant glimpse of a moving train—only its long, mournful whistle in the night. Surely your city

IN THE COUNTRY

is artful in the fascination of her lovers—she indicates so proudly the means for their escape.

CAROLINE.

NEW YORK,

February 8, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

You poor dear—but there's a thing I've been wanting to ask you for some time: Is Jim looking over your shoulder, or isn't he? Does he open your mail, or doesn't he?

Jim, if you open Caroline's mail, let me tell you it isn't done. The best people nowadays believe that even a wife should have a little privacy. Next to ether, the most pain-saving discovery of modern times is that a wife can have too much of such a good thing as a husband, a child, or such other dear dependents as are attached to her by blood or marriage—"the ties of kindred or affection."

Jim, if you are still there, let me tell you that you are tedious. You are a good fellow; you play a good hand of bridge and fair golf; you drive your car well; you are a good provider; you and Caroline get together all right when the neighbors have to be entertained, when Tony has the croup, when the will is made,

LETTERS TO A LADY

when the house is on fire. But there are times, Jim, when Caroline is neither a wife, a mother, nor a housekeeper; and at those times she wants to get away from her house, her child and her husband.

In our mothers' time, Jim, she would have said, in those moods when she felt your insufficiency, "I want to be alone! I must be alone for a little while." Then she would have slipped away and have burned her own smoke in solitude. She would have shut herself up in her room for the afternoon, or would have gone for a long, lonely walk. When she came back she would have taken a hot bath, put on a fresh gown and have come down to dinner, and have spooned Tony's victuals into him, and have swabbed up the milk that he spilled on the table-cloth, and have listened to your account of the ravages of the foot and mouth disease, just as patiently as ever—with the same bright, smiling interest.

But what Caroline really wants, Jim, at these times, is not to be alone. What she really wants is a priest who will tell her whether there is anything very sinful in those brief, sharp antipathies that she feels toward you from

IN THE COUNTRY

time to time, that unaccountable need to get away from you—a puzzling essentially feminine impulse, yet not perhaps radically different from the impulse in you which occasionally craves a day out hunting or an evening with the Elks.

What she really wants is a physician who won't laugh at her and tell her she is all right and merely suffering from an acute attack of imagination, but will listen with wise, experienced sympathy, while she tells him all about her queer unlocalizable feeling that she hasn't long to live. As for you, Jim, you know well enough that you always want to swear at her when she does that. It makes you sick. You are not a physician.

Or maybe what she wants is a musician who will do for her what David did for Saul, and release upon the air that oppressive choking little joy or that little mournful foreboding which has been accumulating around her heart all winter. What instrument do you play, Jim? Get over that sense, Jim, that you are so damned sufficient. You aren't.

Maybe what she wants is an absolute woman friend with whom she can have a good "break-

LETTERS TO A LADY

down" and a good cry, and to whom she can confide what an unsympathetic, unappreciative beast you are, Jim.

It is even barely conceivable that she may have a morbid momentary inclination to see some man friend who isn't mixed up with coal bills and hogs and plumbing and croup. She may feel a "frantic impulse"—women have those things—to talk with him about a number of things that have sort of died out of you and interest you no longer. And maybe it would relieve her wonderfully just to stand for a few minutes and exchange silences with him against "an apple-green sunset." How do you react to apple-green sunsets, Jim?

This all connects up, Jim, with your taking it for granted that Caroline would have no objection to your opening this letter; and that, in turn, is connected with what I remember, after a few months' absence, about adult society in Boone County. Its most conspicuous characteristic, as it comes back to me, was the segregation of the sexes. It was organized on the assumption that men and women belong to intellectually different species, that outside the domestic circle they can have nothing to

IN THE COUNTRY

say to one another, and that they must not be socially mixed.

As I recall the matter, it was this way: After a dinner had been got through, there was a prompt division among us, the women went into one room and talked about women's affairs, and the men went into another room and smoked and talked about men's affairs—and the men stayed in their room placidly smoking cigar after cigar till some daring wife tiptoed up to the door, swept the smokers with an impersonal smile, picked up her husband with sharply arched brows, and said: "WE are going home." Then we all went, didn't we? And, "if memory serves," this was substantially the procedure, even when the party was small—two or three couples—except that on such occasions we usually remained in the same room, men and women together, making a pretense at a little common conversation till the inevitable segregation of male and female chairs took place, and the real fun of the evening began, which was to see whether the men's group or the women's group was going to drown the other out.

Years ago I heard an Italian poet, one of our

LETTERS TO A LADY

own novelists and some orthodox Americans talking in an interesting way about American society. The orthodox were robustly agreed that we were getting into a bad way under the influence of "the riot of sex literature." The Italian poet and the American novelist, on the other hand, shocked us all terribly by maintaining that the trouble with American society was the absence of sex from it. I don't think any one there understood what they were getting at. Every one shuddered and rejoiced that there were no women in the room to be horrified by the utterance of a sentiment so paradoxical, so heretical, so untraditional. I, myself, having been born and reared in the notion that the Boone County segregation system was the established and universal order of civil society, was as much astounded as the rest. I hardly dared, I remember, to hunt up my hostess that evening and say good night to her, and tell her what a good time I had had in her husband's smoking-room, for fear she might guess what indelicate subjects we had been discussing—under the influence of foreigners and "radicals."

I never understood, Jim, what they were

IN THE COUNTRY

driving at, till two or three years later I saw, on a French liner, a woman whom I used to call *La Gauloise*. I never met or spoke to her, but every evening, sitting alone in my corner of the *fumoir*, smoking the villainous French government tobacco, drinking the excellent French beer, and pretending to read a novel of Marcelle Tinayre, I waited expectantly, my nose in my book, for her appearance. She usually came in at about 10 o'clock, and made one of a party of seven or eight, mainly French —two or three women and five or six men, mostly officers of the ship. The moment that she arrived the party came to life. She was moderately well-featured, suave-voiced, and talked fluently with a clean precision of consonants, soft vowels and little gurgling, warbling sounds of liquids, which were very grateful to my ear. But her effect, her indescribable effect, was essentially an effect of sex. It was radiant femininity, nothing else. It flashed from her eyes, it rushed across her face in wave after wave of joyous life. She was feeling social pleasure—she was feeling the pleasure of giving pleasure—with such abundance and richness that her caressive delight overflowed, rayed,

LETTERS TO A LADY

rippled, washed over all of us at that end of the room; and the men in her immediate group sat like delighted children, with the foam and spray of her gaiety splashing over them, their faces reflecting hers, with a look of surprised felicity. Barrie once made a phrase which gropes to express such inexpressible magic; she had what he calls "that damned charm," and to a degree that made a feast of her presence.

It struck me then and there, Jim, and I let it strike me every night of the voyage, that a woman who is affluently feminine, and *intellectualizes* and *aestheticizes* her quality as *La Gauloise* did—if you'll allow me those abominable words—enchants men, civilizes them and makes a society with them from which the more brutal element of sex slinks away to the "dark forest," cowed, quelled, like a lion by the bright valiancy of the hunter's fire.

But what I was going to say, Jim, is this: Caroline is beginning to find society in Boone Co. "dismal." Do you give her any chance to express her "damned charm"? Or are you falling into the Boone Co. fashion and gradually converting the sunlight into a domestic

IN THE COUNTRY

monopoly? Jim, if I ever marry I am going to try to keep it in mind not to open my wife's letters.

PAUL.

PINKVILLE, Ky.,

Feb. 15, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

Of course Jim read your letter. I gave it to him, just as I always give him what I think will interest him.

Goodness, Paul, what a surprising lot you know about women! Wherever did you gather all that insight? As Richardson did, by constant observation at close hand? My letters couldn't have contributed much, they are such meagre documents.

But I do think you're right about the segregation of the sexes in Boone County society. It gives the effect of a Quaker meeting (without the silence), doesn't it? Or a Russian church. The smoking-room is really a terrible deterrent to the civilizing influence of women. But we are invading it. A month ago Susan Arnold walked boldly in and smoked a cigarette with the gentlemen, and we are still feeling the pleasant thrill and horror of it. Susan has never ventured to do it since, but we are, wickedly,

LETTERS TO A LADY

in our heart of hearts, hoping that sometime she may.

Do you find things better arranged there? Is "La Gauloise" becoming a common figure? Surely you must meet some interesting women in New York. Why don't you write me something about them?

CAROLINE.

P. S.—What were you going to say when you interrupted yourself to write to Jim?

PINKVILLE,
Feb. 26, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

You are really more kinds of an idiot than I thought you were. How long have you been counting the sighs of repining wives—been priest and physician and harpist to imaginative females? When you lived in Boone County I had the idea that you were a regular he-man, could ride a horse, drive a car, shoot pretty straight, tell a good yarn and carry your share of liquor. In New York you seem to be spending your time counting feminine heart-beats and raising a great hue and cry whenever there seems to be one missing.

What you say about Caroline is rot. I haven't noticed her moping. She hasn't shown any

IN THE COUNTRY

concern about my reaction to "apple-green sunsets." (As a matter of fact I'd be awfully interested to see one, but, personally, I don't believe they exist.) Nor does she seem to care whether I play an instrument or not. She plays her own a good deal lately, and sings, which is supposed to indicate a cheerful state of mind. And when she showed me your letter she laughed right merrily.

Of course, she may be concealing some black unrest from me, but then, suppose she does feel a little "dismal," I reckon we all go through that occasionally; and, really, Paul, your letter was a confounded impertinence. You don't know a damned thing about what Caroline needs, which is what we all need, by the way—hard work and a little worry. If she had to spend the day riding or driving over a muddy plantation in the February chill, wondering whether enough darkies were going to stay on the place to put in the new crop, and whether the high freight rates had left enough of the old one to feed them through the rest of the winter if they did stay—if she came in at night soggy and tired, hot food and a leaping fire would make her glow with a feeling of well-

LETTERS TO A LADY

being no sunset ever produced. Then she might be glad of the companionship of even a spouse, and she wouldn't care much whether she had a chance to express her "damned charm" or not.

Why, even Gypsy gets temperamental when she's been stall-fed too long. Gypsy, by the way, is developing into as clean and dainty a little mare as any one would care to own. Yesterday morning, when I came home from Louisville, and took her out of the barn for the first time in three days, her imagination was working like a steam-engine. She put back her ears when any one came near; she saw blue goblins in every cabin we passed; she jumped with terror at every quick sound; she took sudden notions about where she wanted to go, and sulked when they disagreed with mine.

We worked hard all day, Gypsy and I. We went over the south woods, where a big drove of hogs is foraging, and through the heavy ground along the edge of the swamp, planning a ditch to drain the lower end of it. The further we went the less attention Gypsy gave to the sky and the goblins, the more to the job on hand—or under foot. Her hoofs came out of the soft mud with a sharp sucking sound, and

IN THE COUNTRY

the rein began to rub a white lather on her smooth chestnut neck. By the time we turned home, with her feet on firmer ground, she swung gladly into a short, even canter, and at the gate she nuzzled old Webster affectionately when he came to lead her away.

The trouble with Caroline (if there is any) is that she has too little to do and too much of your damned new literature to read—the stuff I suppose you are engaged in producing. You can't read all day about people with mysterious "unconscious" desires and rebellions, with "complexes" and "mournful forebodings" and "frantic impulses" without discovering that you have them all yourself. You get to be like old Ned Taylor, whom you must surely remember. He used to pore over "the doctor book" until he began to see dark spots before his eyes, to feel dry, prickly sensations in his skin, to have a pain in his heart, and to complain of a bitter taste in his mouth.

I don't suppose you ever read good old Carlyle any more, Paul, but do you remember how his downright power delighted us when we discovered him in our college days? I suppose the old boy is hopelessly out of date now, but he

LETTERS TO A LADY

keeps popping up in my mind in the midst of my draining projects. Do you remember his passage on labor, mental and physical?

How, as a free-flowing channel, dug and torn by the noble force through the sour mud swamp of one's existence, like an ever-deepening river there, it runs and flows; draining off the sour, festering water, gradually, from the root of the remotest grass blade; making, instead of pestilential swamp, a green, fruitful meadow with its clear-flowing stream. How blessed for the meadow itself, let the stream and its value be great or small!

Completely out of date!

As to Caroline—but, then, it's none of your damned business. For the Lord's sake, Paul, if you haven't got a man's job, get somebody to let you dig a ditch, and stop imagining things about Caroline.

JIM.

NEW YORK,

February 22, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Yes, let Jim look over your shoulder this time too if he wants to. I suppose he will want to, in order to see how I am writhing under his two-fisted castigation and his contempt of silly idiots who wish to exchange silences against apple-green sunsets.

IN THE COUNTRY

But ask Jim this: ask him if he knows why dear old friends, who have lived in intimate association and mutual dependence for years, often, when destiny separates them by a state or two, exchange three or four letters at lengthening intervals and then, after mutual protestations of fidelity, lapse into absolute silence.

Mrs. Clove and Mrs. Cinnamon dwelt year after year in adjoining cottages of an elm-shaded street in Pinkville, Ky. From their first meeting they recognized that they were two souls with but a single thought—and sometimes not that much. But they took to each other like Ruth to Naomi, David to Jonathan, Orestes to Pylades, and all the other famous friends of the world. They were inseparable. Whether they had a thought to share, or only half or a quarter of a thought to the two of them, they managed to meet daily after breakfast for a half-hour's clatter. Each afternoon at 4 o'clock they would either meet again stealthily in each other's kitchen, and warm up the remainder of the morning's coffee together, and report progress in the battle of life, or they would be drinking tea with some of their neighbors.

Evenings they would be partners at bridge

LETTERS TO A LADY

four nights a week, and three nights a week it would be something else—together. They knew each other's thoughts and feelings so completely that it didn't make the slightest difference which one you met. One was just as good as the other; neither of their husbands counted, and, like their houses, they were confused by the neighbors. So for fifteen years. Then came Destiny with the abhorred shears! In other words, Bertha Clove's husband got a better job in Georgia, and Betty Cinnamon, heart-widowed, was left alone in Pinkville, desolate as a "mouhnin' dove."

Betty and Bertha were both literate women—at least they had A. B. degrees from Smith and Bryn Mawr. And face to face they were two of the most voluble and expressive women I have ever studied, though, to tell the truth, I could never keep my mind long on anything they were saying—it seemed out of place and unnecessary—my mind, I mean. But did Betty and Bertha correspond after their separation? They tried it: a letter or two, then a scribbled postcard or so about a sore throat and a dentist, then a *picture* postcard, then—utter silence. Such silence as falls when the

IN THE COUNTRY

first hour after midnight strikes in a lonely house in the country.

Some people said that Bertha and Betty were "too lazy" to write. They were not. I knew them both—especially Bertha Clove. She was far from lazy. Betty was a little lazy. But I know they both tried to sustain by letter that ancient and famous friendship, and that they absolutely failed. Ask Jim if he knows why. I will tell him why, because I'm sure he doesn't know. They failed because they found that their letters and postcards were, relatively speaking, just dry straw. Everything that had made their personal intercourse fresh, dewy, delicious, fragrant, refreshing, evergreen, had dropped out. All the rarity of it was gone. Any one could have written the letters—almost any one could have written them better. To their own surprise, I fancy, they learned that *words* had not been the carriers of the precious part of their communications. All the strong fibres in that bond had been woven with other instruments—tones, laughter, looks in the eyes, swift glances which exchanged instantaneous sympathies, silences speaking whole volumes in the lifting of an eyelid.

LETTERS TO A LADY

You have asked me a great many interesting questions which I don't answer. For example, your postscript: What was I going to say when I began my last letter, "You poor dear"—and then stopped? I will not tell you. Jim, the good fellow, could give only one interpretation to it. Yes, I *will* tell you, after all. I was going to try to say something that would not mean anything at all to a two-fisted Elk, but would *feel* like one of those little breaths of early spring that come stealing up from the South at about this time of the year. It should have played a soft little air around the melancholy of a Lady in Boone County who looks out from her inland windows and dreams of the masts of seagoing ships.

The reason I leave most of your best questions unanswered is that I have long suspected I was writing to two people, one of whom could understand what I was saying; the other, not. My last letter, I concede, was outrageous. Please tell Jim it was a deliberate trap to catch him "listening in," and settle that point. Your joint reply to it, which first amused me, ended by making me "furious." It convinced me

IN THE COUNTRY

that, if apology is due, it is from you and Jim, not from me.

Should you like to know why? Or do you know already? Was it quite intentional on your part that, as I read your letters, I could visualize you there in the breakfast room, fragrant with the odor of violets and the percolator and Jim's pipe—Jim with his nose in the stock quotations, you opening the letters, smiling across at him and saying, "Do you know, James, that, though he has not the least suspicion of it himself, he is ready to fall madly in love with me?"

Do you know where the words that I have just put into your mouth come from, Caroline? They come word for word out of Shaw's "Candida," which I happened to see on the very evening that Jim's letter came explaining to me that I am an idiot. (Paul as Eugene Marchbanks! Delicious for Paul.) If there is one man in literature who wouldn't be mistaken for me anywhere in Boone County, it is Eugene Marchbanks. For heaven's sake, Caroline, tell Jim that I am not in love with you, and *don't expect to be!*

LETTERS TO A LADY

I wish I were. How I wish I were! It would be so much more interesting for both of us—for all of us.

Do you remember how—but next time.

PAUL.

PINKVILLE,

March 1, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

I was much moved by the affecting tale of Mrs. Cinnamon and Mrs. Clove, whose epic friendship came to an end because of the flatness of written words upon a page. Is friendship, indeed, but the lifting of an eyelid? Is there no "marriage of true minds"? Alas!

Yes, you are right. Sometimes the flatly written word is death to friendship. But she has other enemies quite as potent. A friendship of ideas, which has long been fed on letters, will sometimes die when exposed again to "tones," "laughter" and "looks in the eyes."

Indeed, one has just died. Do you remember Allan Marshall, whom Jim and I both knew in the army? He was rather dashing, you know, slim and erect, with twinkling boots and a not unbecoming air of authority. We have only followed him since in a correspond-

IN THE COUNTRY

ence more or less regularly kept up by the three of us. And his letters were like him: thin, but direct; twinkling a little, but tinged with a certain air of authority, as of one who knew whereof he wrote. To tell you the truth, Paul, in days long past, before certainty had put romance to sleep, I had sometimes thought of him as "the not impossible he," and if the pattern of things had been different—if apple-trees bloomed in December and nuts fell to earth in May—in short, if Jim had not been Jim—

Well, Allan Marshall came to Boone County last week and stayed with us for several days. He is a banker now in Cincinnati, and he is planning enthusiastically to buy the bank in Pinkville. He wants to bring it up to date, just as Pinkville itself, he says, with all the new highways now a-building, will soon be brought up to date.

Yes, he was convincing. As he talked eagerly, with his short, clipped sentences, I was spell-bound, I admit. The Pinkville Bank of to-day dissolved before my vision like a screen representation of a memory—the dim, smoky interior, with its uneven, tobacco-stained floor, its windows darkened by the fly-specks of

LETTERS TO A LADY

years, its marred brown railings, with old Ethan Clark, bowed and withered, adding figures on his stool, and with the stove in the back of the room, kept in deference to old times and to the little knot of old soldiers which still gathers round it. As Allan talked there arose a bright, clean structure in its place. The floors were tile; cages were partitioned off with clouded glass; there was the click of adding-machines run by brisk and busy clerks. It sounded so possible that Jim and I both wanted to invest in it, if only the plantation didn't eat up every available bit of capital these days.

Yes, Allan was as convincing as ever, and he looked about the same. Not quite so erect, perhaps, nor so slim, but still speaking with the authority and glittering directness of a knife, the authority of one who knows his figures and that they never lie. And yet, Paul, this time he left me utterly cold. His tones, his laughter, his glances, and his silences were as they always had been, but they touched me like damp, dead air that made me recoil and sent me inside myself for comfort.

Do you suppose it will be like that when you come back to Boone County, Paul? Why don't

IN THE COUNTRY

you come and try the experiment? Of course I know you aren't in love with me, but you might come just to let me prove that I'm not in love with you. A week or two and spring will be at hand, though there are few enough signs of her now. Only the sun is out at last, and the blue-grass on the upland slopes, where we could ride against the March wind, is showing an almost imperceptible wash of green. From my window I can see a growing redness in the distant gray haze of branches that is the woods, and yesterday at noon, when I rode down through the sugar maple grove, the trunks of the trees were streaked with moisture and last autumn's leaves on the ground were sweet with little pools of dripping sap here and there. If I sat quite still in the saddle and listened I could hear sometimes the tinkle of a falling drop.

Jim, by the way, seconds the invitation. He says he can show you some duck-hunting that will make you forget the city. He will give you silences of woods and marsh, real masculine silences, made of rigid muscular alertness, disturbed only by the whirr of wings and the sharp report of a gun.

LETTERS TO A LADY

The very season seems to have that alert silence now. Nothing has changed much, yet everything has changed. The wind still blows cold and penetrating. There are no swelling buds, no nesting birds, no languorous warmth of spring, and yet the air and the very mud underfoot have a new quality, appealing to no one of the senses, but nevertheless making you feel the presence of something brilliant and taut, as a tiger crouched to spring.

Perhaps you think me a little mad for that figure of speech. Jim would. He feels the changing season, I know, for his whistling has taken on a blither quality, and he talks a great deal about risks of an early planting, but I'm sure he doesn't feel the tiger, the tension in the air.

And so Jim isn't seeing this letter. Nor did he see your last one to me, though I delivered most of your messages. I kept it back partly to mollify you, partly from vanity, I suppose, and partly for strategy. What woman wants a man, even her husband, to know that another (and a Southern gentleman at that) has made her a declaration of not being in love?

Nevertheless, it's well you aren't, Paul. For

IN THE COUNTRY

love is ecstasy and ache, a sort of topsy-turvy-dom, an upset equilibrium, a turning upside down of all the well-balanced values of your life. It's a diffusion of the orderly stream of your own will into marshy byways. It's a blind groping for that which you may never reach: the inner life of someone else. It makes of you something that is not yourself. It incapacitates you for the work which is yours, and it gives you a sort of fumbling service to perform in its place.

No, it wouldn't be comfortable for you, Paul.

Though, no doubt, I should find it interesting.

CAROLINE.

NEW YORK,
March 8, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Now we can talk ! Your last letter made my heart ache—for Pinkville. You must have intended it to do just that. Otherwise you would not have let me see you riding up against the March wind, spying out the spring, like a tiger couchant in the gumwood, nor have filled my ears with the whirr of wild ducks' wings. You were there—in that letter—in a way that strikes me as “somehow good.” I like you, Caroline,

LETTERS TO A LADY

in quite a number of ways, well enough—singing, sitting in the library, talking about Chinese and Persian and Indian art; but I like you best on a hilltop against the wind and sky. Don't you rather like yourself that way?

You are malicious. I deny that I made you “a declaration of not being in love.” What I said was, to *tell Jim* that I was not in love and did not expect to be. But when I said that I had not received your latest letter.

Do you remember how we laughed once over a passage in George Eliot's correspondence or journals or somewhere? She records, as I recall it, that she and Herbert Spencer had been having a very frank talk—wouldn't you like to have heard it?—and *having agreed that they were not in love with each other*, they felt that there was no reason why they should not see as much of each other as they pleased. Just image to yourself the peril of two such people meeting on any other conditions.

That was the way the beloved old Victorians made life interesting. If George had cared deeply for Herbert, or if Herbert had cared deeply for George, then, of course, one of the dear old dodos would have had to run over to

IN THE COUNTRY

the Continent and stay there till the emotion died out, and it was safe to return. *Noblesse oblige.* When all interest on both sides was extinct, they could meet again as often as they liked, twice a week, thrice a week, daily, maybe. Think of it! What a code!

We children of a later day agreed—I think Jim was in the crowd, and it must have been five or six years ago, when we were all young and foolish—we agreed that unless people were more or less in love it was hardly worth while for them to meet at all, socially. To meet on any other terms was such a bore—like the ordinary Pinkville dinner parties, where no one seemed to get any joy out of it except couples like Mrs. Clove and Mrs. Cinnamon, who were under the inebriating influence of a mutual and chronic “crush.”

But nowadays the good old Victorian love—Rochester, Launcelot, The House of Life, Paolo and Francesca, Stephen Phillips—love under the shadow of swords and chaperons—all that has gone by with so many other Victorian things. If one waited for love to make a meeting interesting and dangerous, one would wait a long time—in New York.

LETTERS TO A LADY

Of course they have something which they think is just as good or better. But I wish you could see the comedies which reflect our tone here. They don't even feign emotion. They don't even talk about "falling in love"; they call it, like the "villain" in "Ariadne"—a clever new Theatre Guild production—they call it "having a little fun."

Down town they are playing "Candida" in costumes of the '90s. Candida sweeps the stage with her gown and peers out at you oddly between the little balloons at the top of her sleeves. I infer they costume the play in that fashion in order to suggest to the sense of Broadway the extreme quaintness of ideas once thought dangerously "advanced." The problem which Shaw debated so earnestly, no great while ago either, has ceased to exist. A Greenwich Village poet would have not a moment's hesitation about telling Candida what he had in his heart. But he would choke with no inexplicable emotions. They are all gone—together with the conventions which forbade expressing them.

Indirectly, I am telling you now why I have sent you none of my verse. I don't seem to

IN THE COUNTRY

feel verse here. Everything is too amusing. One isn't on the poetical key. Advertising writes itself. So one writes advertising.

Even spring here is artificial and a bit comic. One goes into the subway to look for flowers, finds them there, too, fine ones, my three favorites—violets, lilies-of-the-valley and pansies. I have a bunch of violets on my desk now, big, single, violet-colored violets with a woodsy smell. A week or so ago there was one little clap of spring thunder over Harlem, and last night there was an earthquake which shook the topless towers of the Woolworth Building and the Equitable Life; but I knew nothing of it till I "saw it in the paper." A friend in Thorpe, Bidwell, recently reported an eye of green in a lilac bush at Rye. As for my direct observation, there is a bird singing on my fire-escape. I suppose he calls it singing. Poor little devil! It's probably the best he can do. Being but an English sparrow. That is all God had for him. Or for me, either, I begin to think.

Only your letter, Caroline, put me in an antique mood, and called back something that I thought was gone where balloon sleeves went. Merely for your amusement, I enclose some

LETTERS TO A LADY

old-fashioned Kentucky verses, which will complete my explanation of why I am dropping poetry for advertising. They were written to a “flame” as extinct as Allan Marshall, and are inscribed

TO THE WELL-BELOVED

Not in the melting mood I love you best,
Beloved, not when you come with misty eyes
To kneel at my side, silent, with hands that cling,
And suppliant lips, flower-soft, and golden heart,
Laid like a conqueror’s tribute at my feet.

For then, meseems, the candid face I love,
Profiled and proud against the morning sky,
Breaks up, dissolves, like a soft moon-molten cloud
In summer nights, the shining contours gone.

You that I love all ways, I love the most
Masterless, moving at your own times and tides,
Or standing aloof—at a small remove!—alert,
Mocking and sharp, an edged, defiant blade,
Proud, unvanquishable, self-contained,
A challenge, a whiff of the wind, a counterblast.
Be proud for me, beloved, surrender not:
Still be, sweet foe, my heavenly enemy.

I might say “in closing,” that next time, if you don’t put it out of my head, I will explain how wrong you are in your *entire theory* of love.

PAUL.

IN THE COUNTRY

PINKVILLE,

March 15, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

Oh! That kind of love. . . .

Do you know, Paul, I believe we are changing places, the way we used to in the old game of "Pussy Wants a Corner." You wrote, once upon a time:

There you are where I long to be, and here I am, where you wish you were! It seems terribly obvious, doesn't it, that we ought to swap our commodities and get what we want? You send me mistletoe and swamp narcissus and keep the odor of Kentucky woods about my table.

And you, in your turn, were to send me fragments of New York. Do you realize what has actually been going on? It is I who have been sending you New York, in little packets of Oriental shop windows, glamorous streets and seagoing ships, while you have given me Kentucky.

You said, at that same time, that your roots were bleeding from having been torn out of Kentucky soil. Your last letter shows me that you have cauterized them. And the signs I tell by are these: You cease to feel poetry; you find the world not poignant, but amusing—even the

LETTERS TO A LADY

spring; you are wandering out of the Forest of Arden on your way to the London of Queen Anne. And you like it.

And I? I glance within me and find, with the turn of the season, that mistletoe and swamp narcissus are growing in great profusion there.

And outside, my actual garden, tended most carelessly in other years, is beginning to absorb me. In the evening, with all the faith of a *religieuse*, I pore over the varicolored seed catalogues and their prophecies of miracles to come. And in the morning, when the necessary daily tasks indoors are hurried through, I rush out to have a look at the tulip-beds and to observe the long green tips with as much pride as if I were pushing them through, myself. Wind and rain have taken on the character of personal foes or allies, and the feel of cool, crumbling earth is grateful to my skin.

Once you would have made me envious with your talk of pansies, violets and lilies-of-the-valley. But now I am content to wait for them. After all, you are children, you New Yorkers. You want it to be Christmas all the time. In December your windows are full of rows and rows of strawberries primly packed in boxes,

IN THE COUNTRY

each with a fat red cheek turned meekly to view. And there are mushrooms and fresh green peas and radishes and ripe tomatoes when the snow is still swirling around the street corners in stinging gusts.

Somehow, it seems to me now that there is an absurdly childish impatience in all that plunder of the future. What is a strawberry in December? Nothing but a taste in the mouth. But a strawberry in Kentucky in May! You gather them to the tune of a mocking-bird's song. You find them warm and sweet with sunshine—sweeter with the sun still on them than later, when you eat them cool and sugared from a silver dish—as if the yellow light were a sort of honey pouring over them. I remember picking wild ones last year in a meadow. The earth was soft with fragrant grasses and warm to my body pressed close against it. The berries, clinging to the ground, were refreshing drops of crimson dew distilled out of the spring air.

Of course, when you first go to the city you buy, along with your berries, all these crowding memories of earth and sun. A mushroom has not yet become merely a mushroom, but is still “the elf of plants,” as Emily Dickinson calls it.

LETTERS TO A LADY

It is the sound of a waking-spring rain on the roof at night, the sight of the wood in early morning with the drops still hanging, thick and glittering, from new green leaves. It is the damp, earthy smell of decayed stumps, where the little gnomelike plants have sprung over-night in a variety of quaint small forms.

What are violets and lilies-of-the-valley purchased in a subway unless they bring with them the brush of hands across thick dark-green leaves in search of white and purple blossoms, or careful fingers tracing fragile stems down to the moist earth?

For awhile all these memories and associations are thrown in with your city purchases, but gradually they drop away. You really haven't time to think about them. And so strawberries or mushrooms become merely a taste in the mouth and violets a spot of color over a gas-log.

Yes, I am growing content to wait for all good things until the swinging seasons bring them round to me in the fulness of time—to wait for them, to taste them and to let them pass.

Goodness! I sound middle-aged! Like a

IN THE COUNTRY

planter and a conservative! And I don't want to at all. I don't want to "go back on" the city with its living, varied, human companionship, its intricate network of lives and its shooting new ideas, as clean and lancelike as my growing tulip-tips. I don't want to like doing without the constant little shocks of encounter with other loves and joys and desperate problems. And I don't want to think that only the swinging seasons, and not fighting measures, can bring them or take them away.

But to return to your letter and to love—

Your unique poem, "To the Well-Beloved," pleased—and interested me. Of course I wondered why the flame died. I suppose the lady began to find it difficult to hold unrelaxed the sharp and mocking lines of her proud profile.* I suppose she felt a little pricking desire to turn and look at you squarely, and then she laughed a little, and then your fire flickered and—went out—as all fires must.

The new mode in love, the only kind of love you say they are making in New York, love whose course always runs smooth, love with

* That sentence made me very angry at the time, but I never got around to reply to it.—PAUL.

LETTERS TO A LADY

no locksmiths to laugh at, without “swords and chaperons” and moonlit gardens and—hunger and sorrow and disillusionment—that kind of love; why, that is strawberries in December, stripped of their trappings of sun and earth and fragrant grasses; that’s no better than a spot of violet over a gas-log.

Fall in that kind of love with me as deeply as you please, Paul. (“Deeply” is hardly the word.) I don’t suppose that even Jim would object to that. In fact I think he’d rather resent it if you didn’t—as if you’d offered me a slight. Have you forgotten that to make that kind of love is only common politeness in Kentucky—like holding open a door for a lady to pass?

But I suppose you have. And I remember that in New York they don’t hold doors open for ladies to pass. They order things differently there.

CAROLINE.

DEAR CAROLINE:

March 22.

“Oh! That kind of love!” you exclaim, and turning away from your garden gate, where we were just beginning the most interesting kind

IN THE COUNTRY

of a talk, you walk off into the garden and, with your back toward me, commence digging in the tulip-beds.

“No! *Not* that kind of love!” I shout back over the hedge and, pulling my hat down over my eyes, stalk off down the road.

When I was a wholly inexperienced youth in college I remember our wise English professor set a classroom-ful of us young ignoramuses discussing what George Meredith could have meant when he said that woman would be the last province of nature civilized by man. Caroline, don’t you know that civilized people don’t quarrel *by mail*?

It’s barbarous business—quarrelling by mail; the barb sticks for a week before it can be extracted, if then, for it’s likely to “work in.” Your volley of mockery in your last letter spoiled my mood for a week—made me spend seven long days in a chilly gray total eclipse of the sun. It hurts, like love—at this end. But I suppose “coquetry” or amusement or just mere indifference inflicted the wound. . . .

On consideration, I take that back. I will be honest, even if you can’t rise to it. Actually, I suppose you took that line out of curiosity

LETTERS TO A LADY

—what you will call “legitimate curiosity”—in order to learn whether you *could* hurt me, which, according to the barbaric conception of womankind, seems to be the only satisfactory evidence of power.*

Caroline, wouldn’t you like, for once in your life, as a novelty, as an experiment, as perhaps a wild, rash adventure—to be simple, straightforward, sincere and square with a man? Instead of trying to ascertain in how many different ways you can elude, evade, baffle, puzzle and circumvent him? I’ll give you a chance. Do what you please with it.

I am a lonely man—Lord, how that sounds! *How* that sounds! But before you laugh, listen a minute: “Everything that is lonely is beautiful.” Where did I get that? From a little swarthy elf of an Irish poet, who closed his eyes, and, with a swaying movement of his body, sang to us hypnotically, holding the “o” of “lonely” till he made it a solitude as solitary as the innermost chamber of a soul, and the “u” of “beautiful” till he made it an ecstasy: “Ev-er-y-thing that is lo . . . onely is bu . . . utiful.” It was the “Crock of Gold”

*What about quarrelling by mail?—CAROLINE.

IN THE COUNTRY

man, the “Mary, Mary” man, the “Deirdre” man, who has just published “In the Land of Youth”—James Stephens, whom we both adore. He looks like a smaller, darker, graver brother of Padraic Colum; and I think they both came up through a secret door from under the roots of the same old oak tree. These Irish bards, all of them, from Yeats down, or up, as you like, understand loneliness, and they say it is bu . . . utiful.

In Innisfrae, very likely it is.

But, Caroline, my experience in New York doesn’t bear them out. I am not beautifully lonely here, but infernally so. *Surface* company I have had a plenty of, at the office and elsewhere; but essentially, internally, I have been, except for your letters, terribly solitary—mornings, evenings, and Sundays especially! And at all times when I have certain kinds of experience which crave to be shared. I grow increasingly dependent on your letters. For what?—I ask myself. I don’t know exactly—for connection with the life I enjoyed and for recovery of the tune I had in my head before I went into “the advertising game”; for a sense of something much more deeply satisfying than

LETTERS TO A LADY

"having a good time," as that is understood in the Broadway theatres and at the Village parties; for a spirit which sheds a bit of the light-that-never-was, even upon shooting through the subway to Thorpe & Bidwell's. When you write to me, as you did March 1, out of your own "lonesomeness," which seems much more beautiful than mine—more fragrant and more musical—then I feel a kind of happiness, an elation, which seems to me, however critically I inspect it, a pure unadulterated good, of which one can't have too much. I want more of it. I am hungry for more of it.

I am a cold thousand miles away. You suggested recently that I run out to Pinkville in the spring, go duck-hunting* with Jim, and—and what? Heaven knows how I want to!—go duck-hunting with Jim. The thought of it sets me dreaming every morning, when the trains go puffing by, down below there, by the Hudson—dreaming till I almost forget to knock the ashes out of my pipe and go downtown to work. But, to tell the plain truth, I don't dare to revisit Pinkville. Why?

* There is a U. S. law against shooting ducks in the spring. Caroline's mistake. I've forgotten just when the season ends.
—PAUL.

IN THE COUNTRY

Well, first, because it is clear to me, if it isn't to you, that what I have been talking about is not what you call "Southern gallantry," and it is not what is called on Broadway "having a good time." It is no more like these forms of manners and merriment than "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-Night" is like the Moonlight Sonata.

But that isn't the real reason why I don't dare to revisit Boone County. The real reason is that, since I have eliminated "Southern gallantry" and "having a good time," you—not to speak of Jim—you, being only a delightful, primitive, adorable, barbarian creature, you will at once conclude that "worst has come to worst," or however you choose to regard it, and that I have "fallen" into that state—I should regard it as falling—which you recently described as "an ache, a topsyturvydom, a turning upside down of all the well-balanced values of life, a blind groping for the inner life of some one else, a thing that incapacitates you for the work that is yours."

Of love at sixteen or of barbaric passion I should say you had given an almost "classical" description. But is that the only alternative?

LETTERS TO A LADY

I cannot see of what earthly use such a passion is to a civilized adult. Did you get that out of books or out of experience? *It isn't what I want.* Do you want anything like that again? Isn't this distraction and topsyturvydom, of which you speak, just the note of something immature which doesn't understand itself and doesn't know how to express itself?

I have an intense desire to believe that mature civilized experience may yield something better—an allotropic form of the emotion, related to this horrible perturbation as the forms of art are related to the forms of nature. Art is not less wild and intense than nature, but it knows what it is about. I am haunted by that passage in Pater about getting "the irrepressible conscience of art, that spirit of control, into the general course of life, above all into its energetic or impassioned acts." Love as an immense dynamic power, yes, but seconding one's intelligent purpose, not thwarting it. You think of love as a tumult and shipwreck. I think of it as a strong river on which one would like to feel one's self upborne, as Cleopatra's barge burned on the water, and

IN THE COUNTRY

carried forward where one really wants to go. Certainly all those possibilities of richer human intercourse, of which our novelists talk so much nowadays, depend less upon the enfranchisement of love than upon the control of it for new uses; or perhaps one should say the possibility of enfranchising it depends upon the possibility of civilizing it.

I have only skirted the edge of the “theory” that I promised you. If I were sure that it is sound I could not let the spring go by in Kentucky without a flying visit. And yet if you, remaining still in that belated feminine barbarism of which Meredith was conscious, if you think my theory nonsense, then I should be farther away from you among the blossoms of the Kentucky April than I am here theorizing in New York.

Tell me this, Caroline—if you are capable of truth in this matter—tell me this: first, how many times—hard, modern, complete truth, mind you!—have you been in love since you were sixteen, and at what ages; and, second, *is there any evolution in the form of the emotion, or is it, at thirty, just the same “sweet mad-*

LETTERS TO A LADY

ness" that it was at sixteen? I shall wait for your answer—sort of breathlessly.

PAUL.

PINKVILLE,

March 29, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

Your letter furnished a persistent, disturbing undertone to all the hurried events of the week. Allan Marshall is here, and is actually beginning work on his new bank building. I told you that the old glitter of military days was gone from him, but somehow he still wears the color of romance. To-day he challenges me with something more intensely alive than anything I have yet felt in Boone County. When I am with him I feel the rhythm of the world's trade, the sweep of currency, the flow of commerce.

It was such topics that kept us all lingering at the breakfast table, at lunch and over the coffee-cups at dinner, Allan talking, Jim putting in occasionally and I listening. But as I listened, always, under the tinkle of cups and saucers and the incision of Allan's speech, your little plaintive refrain kept running through my head: "I am a lonely man."

I did not laugh at it, Paul. And I do not

IN THE COUNTRY

wish to quarrel with you—although there is always something in your letters that calls for argument: George Meredith this time, for instance. Don't believe that he thought Woman uncivilized just because he gave that sentiment to one of his characters, the least wise of them!

By the way, whoever started that absurd idea that Man is logical and consistent? He isn't. Here you are, for example, asking for a "challenge, a whiff of wind, a counterblast," and then railing at it; pleading for mocking enmity, and then demanding simplicity, straightforwardness, sincerity. No, you are changeful and capricious, every mother's son of you.

I haven't the slightest desire to quarrel, and pride itself forbids me to meet you with averted face, "profiled and proud against the morning sky." * I want to face you, Paul, you and all the disturbing issues you arouse. And so I'll try to give some sort of answer to your queries (which sound remarkably like an intelligence test or an application blank):

"How many times have I been in love since sixteen?"

* Damnable iteration about that "profile." I wish I had never written that poem.—PAUL.

LETTERS TO A LADY

“At what ages?”

“Do I perceive any evolution in the form of the emotion?”

Why didn’t you put in some dotted lines for my answers?

No, love at sixteen wasn’t the wild “sweet madness” you suggest. It was shy and wistful as a snowdrop, cool and fresh and virginal, a bud which never dared push its way quite out of the moss. And when it was blasted, the easy relieving tears I wept washed almost all its memory out of mind.

It was not until twenty-two that love was tempestuous. It began with a strong, clear wind, and I ran before it like a ship under full sail. “This,” I said, “gives us wings. All else is merely creeping.” Then the wind freshened. Tempest. Pounding waves. Shipwreck. Was it because the ship’s master was unskilled and inexperienced in the art of—mocking? Anyway, it was a shaken thing, with leaking hull, with timbers wrenched, with twisted, splintered spars, that crept, with the calm, into port—into a broad, sunny harbor, fair and safe and ordered.

At thirty love is harbor, Paul. It is lying at

IN THE COUNTRY

anchor on the broad, placid bosom of the waters, between wide protecting arms, watching sleepily the orderly activity of the little tugs that go puffing back and forth, forgetting the tempests of the past until some weather-scarred tramp comes limping in, or some new, freshly painted yacht sails proudly out.

Don't forget that I am in love with Jim, in love with his common sense and with his broad humor and his tenderness that makes small things, like Tony and the shepherd pups, go rolling after him whenever he leaves the house. He is like a clear sunlight that shows things in their own hard outlines, that throws them into their proper proportions, but floods one, at the same time, with a bright sense of well-being.

And yet . . .

And yet, somehow, for me sunlight isn't always enough. Is it disloyal to need the delicate gray shadings of a thin, fine rain waving across the far purple of the woods? To long sometimes for the white distorting mist that you and I used to love? Do you remember how it rolled before us, blinding us, and how it frosted the manes of our horses and even our own eye-

LETTERS TO A LADY

lashes, so that they felt wet and cold and feathery against our cheeks? As you rode ahead the fog seemed to lift you, till your horse floated whitely away from the ground. I need the mist, and I need the great void silence of the night when the tall, black cypress out there in the swamp reaches to grasp the moon.

I'm lonely, too. But I have invented a remedy for it. All through the week, as I sit reading before the fire, or go digging in the earth, or riding out toward the woods past cabins where I hear full-voiced Negro rhythms—all through the week I gather precious bits of things to send to you. I hoard them up like a squirrel. And when I write there is always an absurd miscellaneous heap of them; the flaming new spring song of the cardinal, the cruel death of old Webster's daughter, caused by "hants" who left two sticks tied together in her bed; the small, sharp tracks of deer in the mud over near the swamp, and the way a shadow fell across a steel-colored pool. Of course, most of these things never get into my letters, but the gathering of them is a remedy for loneliness—better, perhaps, than your ac-

IN THE COUNTRY

tual presence would be. I might passionately want you to see the shadow on the pool just as I saw it, only to discover that you were looking at my profile instead.

Yes, I am lonely, too. And I suppose Jim is, for that matter, with great acres of loneliness that I can't even touch. We all are—each of us, like the tall, black cypress, reaching for the moon. To me it is the one, the underlying tragedy of everything.

The ship, you see, is tugging a little at her anchor. Sheltered and rebuilt, with stout new cordage quivering in the wind, she feels a new vitality. And, after all, seagoing ships were not made to lie forever in the harbor, but for high seas, ceaseless activity and the work of the world.

Is it carrying the analogy too far to say that the days of sailing-vessels are past, and now, propelled by her own power, she is no longer so fully at the mercy of the winds of love?

All this introspection. . . . But you brought it on yourself. Can you see in it any evolution? Does it tally with your own? Are you coming to Kentucky?

CAROLINE.

LETTERS TO A LADY

NEW YORK,
April 5, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

What is it we are getting at, anyhow? Anything?—anything which as civilized beings we have a right to try for? Anything that lies within the realm of the possible? I have thought a lot about your last letter. Parts of it I read over and over again—the parts about riding in the woods in the mist, and the lonely cypress-trees and the wood things soaked in the rain—deer tracks and shadows in the pool—which you—you heavenly “squirrel”—collected to send to me. It seems—it did seem—as if all that experience belonged to *us*, and to no one else. If it makes us happy to share it, as it does me, why, whom are we depriving of anything that is precious to any one else?

I don't know any one at your house, except you, whom it makes perfectly ecstatic to slosh through the woods in the rain. Do you? As I remember the matter, Caroline, when rain strikes the plantation the only other adult at your house promptly takes to his slippers, “McCall's Magazine” and the open fire. It does seem as if Providence must have intended his rain to give pleasure to some one in Ken-

IN THE COUNTRY

tucky; for he sends it when the tobacco doesn't need it at all, when the rivers are running over and when there is practically no one, but you and me, who is grateful a bit. It does seem like predestination that we should be God's rain-birds.

In my "theory," about which I have hinted so much and said so little, all that one has any right to hope for in such a—oh, call it a "comradeship"—all that an outsider can rightly hope for is a share in the *surplus*—the unharvested surplus which, unless he appears, will go to waste like windfalls in a rich orchard or undiscovered flowers in a mountain meadow, which only the wild deer approach.

What we have in common does seem like such a surplus.

And yet—well, you don't seem willing—or is it *able*?—you don't seem able, let us say, to let us enjoy that mist in the woods as the deer, I imagine, enjoy sniffing the scent of primroses in the little green glades among the pine-trees on the top of the Sierras. I mean *alone* in *solitude*, as if, with respect to the "surplus," there were only two people in the universe, you and I. You dreadfully persist in seeing things to-

LETTERS TO A LADY

gether, talking about them together and making me see *our* rain in the woods as a part of that other adult's plantation.

When you talk about that other adult who lives at your house, and about Tony and the shepherd pups and how they troop out after that other adult, and about how ghastly fond you all are of him, and when you ask me not to forget all that, and when you bring it right in beside the parts of your letter that I have read sixteen times—do you know how it makes me feel?

It makes me feel as Paris did when he came around to be married and found Juliet in a coffin. It makes me feel as if I had just set out for a dance with a very charming person and had suddenly discovered that either she or I or both of us had smallpox. Oh, perhaps that is a shade too violent; but it is something like that—all the previously existing values of things just vanish, go out, like the glow in the bulb when you turn off the electricity.

Is there any sense in feeling that way, or isn't there?* Not everybody does. Heaven knows the people in the Broadway comedies

* No.—CAROLINE.

IN THE COUNTRY

don't—or at least they pretend that they don't. But this last week, as it happens, a poet whom I used to take with me on hunting-trips in Kentucky, Robert Frost, was in town, allowing a group of his old friends and fellow poets to celebrate his fiftieth birthday, by a dinner at the Brevoort, where the *literati* seem to gather for such occasions. I don't know Frost and naturally had no claim to an invitation; but, for half a dollar, I managed to get one of the waiters to let me peep through the door while the speaking was going on; and I saw him and Carl Van Doren and Wilbur L. Cross and Dorothy Canfield and Louis Untermeyer and Walter Prichard Eaton all making speeches at his modest, snowy-gray, "mischievous, vagrant, seraphic," boyish, fifty-year-old head.

All the speakers told all the Yankee stories they could remember; all of them boasted that they were blown-in-the-glass New Englanders —either by birth in Vermont or New Hampshire or by ancestry or by total immersion in the spirit of Robert Frost's poetry. Maybe some of them lied a little—I don't know; but it was delightful to see how they loved him! One really couldn't help that; his modesty is so

LETTERS TO A LADY

delicious, his gray eyes twinkle with such intimate mirth under the downcast lids, his spirit is so clear and sure and quiet. But what impressed me more was to see how all the company delighted to remember the soil and the soul of old New England, which Robert Frost's pale, clean-cut features and snowy head symbolize somehow, like an adorable faun's head carved in the marble of the Rutland quarries.

It reminded me of what I wrote to you last fall about the *petite patrie*, and the sentiment of Vermont farmers for the sap-buckets of Calvin Coolidge's father. And that reminds me that to-day down in Wall Street I saw a sign which suggests that the people who live in that quaint old lane have the same affectionate feeling for the New England stock——

But I wander like the mischief! I brought in Frost to help us discuss our own affairs. He stands, you see, for such a different point of view from the current one. And it happens that he has written on just our questions. Do get his first book, "A Boy's Will," if you haven't it. It is all about the love of such unique beings as we imagine ourselves to be. There is one piece called "Wind and Window Flower."

IN THE COUNTRY

Please read it! It describes poetically and quite perfectly what you do to my “sentiment” when you tell me how devoted you all are to the other adult who lives at your house. The wind, you see, is in love with a window flower, whom he has seen through the pane, all cozy in the fire-light, and a quite beautiful and integral part of that interior. Twice in one day the wind haunts about the pane—

“But the flower leaned aside
And thought of naught to say,
And morning found the breeze
A hundred miles away.”

When one reads that poem, when one lets the New England breeze blow through one’s spirit across the cold New England snow, well, there seems to be simply nothing more to say about how large the human heart is. Isn’t the New England type of heart a little undersized? I would say yes, if it were not for the very last stanza in the last poem of Frost’s book. It is called “Reluctance”; and this is the last stanza:

“Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than treason

LETTERS TO A LADY

To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?"

I've just begun what I am going to say next time—a little quarrelsome!

PAUL.

PINKVILLE,

April 12, 1925.

DEAR PAUL:

After a whole week of sunshine it is raining again—a warm, fragrant fall, fresh as the scent of honeysuckle or lilacs. It made me throw open the veranda window to let it into the room, and then I heard a faint, cool rumble of thunder in the distance. An evening for poetry!

I sat for a long time turning the pages of that new anthology you sent me. One of the poems might have blown in at the window with the damp air, so well does it bespeak the night. It is this one by Babette Deutsch. Do you remember it?

ON A NIGHT OF RAIN

"The rain drops through the dark, an invisible
Net of music, tangling your thought and my
thought.

We beat against the scarcely palpable, wavering

IN THE COUNTRY

Mesh in vain. Beloved, beloved, we are caught.
We must hold the unspoken, guarding the silence,
Hearing, blown to and fro over it, ever the
sound

Of thinly woven silvers, hiding the morning,
Hiding our fear and our sorrow, keeping us
bound.

Softly, steadily swings the intangible shuttle,
Weaving from you to me from my heart to
your heart again.

Whole as the wind is love, immaculate as music,
Love that is the lightnings, and the endlessness
of rain.”

I was moved to take up your letter again,
and to dream over it a little, to sentimentalize,
I fear, until I came to that passage about your
feelings whenever I mention Jim—how it dashes
you, as Paris was dashed when he came to marry
Juliet and found her dead; how it makes you
feel as you would if, on setting out for a dance,
you found that your partner—had smallpox !

At that grotesquerie, Paul, I laughed aloud,
so that Jim looked up inquiringly from his
game of solitaire across the firelight. Now (may
I confess it?) I had to read Jim that little bit
about himself, it was so absurd. But, do you
know, he didn’t find it very amusing. He
grinned politely, in a rather strained way, and

LETTERS TO A LADY

then went on with his game. Pretty soon he came over and sat on the arm of my chair, looking at me in a funny, embarrassed, hurt sort of way.

"Carol, honey, do you and Paul really think of me as if I were pestilence and death coming in between you? Because, if you do, you know, the gentlemanly thing for a horseman to do, even one out of the Apocalypse, is to ride away." (I don't know whether Jim gets his Biblical allusions out of Scripture or novels.)

Well, then, of course, Paul, I had to set the poor dear right, with laughing and caresses, and to explain to him all about your theory of the surplus, how you proposed to share only those of my enjoyments which didn't particularly interest him. (By the way, as I told it, I felt uncomfortably as if I were being staked out in claims, but of that another time.) The puzzling thing was that then he did laugh, this time with genuine lively mirth. He asked me to read that sentence about Paris and the small-pox again, and then he chuckled some more.

"If Paul can find any part of you I don't love," he declared, rather extravagantly, with his cheek against my hair, "he is welcome to it."

IN THE COUNTRY

Turned serious again, he sat there looking soberly into the fire for some time before he came out with:

"You babes in the woods don't seem to realize that it is a theory many people have tried and few, if any, have succeeded in proving. But I've noticed this, that when visionaries believe a thing simply and care enough about it to make a sort of gospel out of it and to suffer a little martyrdom for it, they sometimes make truth out of it."

"I suppose that is what religious people really mean when they talk of a faith that will move mountains," I suggested.

"Yes, and isn't there something about 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he'? Maybe if you both—if we all—give it a fair chance——"

Jim *is* rather sporting, isn't he?

Pretty soon, yawning, he started off to bed, but at the door he turned and said quite casually:

"Oh, Caroline, they're writing me, you know, to come to New York about Uncle Peter's estate. It's damned hard for me to get away just now. Why don't you run up for a few days and look after it yourself, and get a bonnet or two?"

LETTERS TO A LADY

The trip would do you good, and it certainly would give me a lift."

He went off, and I heard him shout to Tom, dozing in the kitchen, to bring me an armload of wood. Then his footsteps creaked on the stairs.

Are we babes in the woods, Paul? In dripping, soggy woods? And, having started sloshing forth, gaily courageous, with cheeks flushed under the cool beat of the drops, shall we suddenly discover that we have lost our way, that all the black, wet tree trunks look alike, that all the long, gray vistas through the forest are shivering, cold and hostile? Will our feet be sticky with mud and heavy with fatigue as we strike out desperately first in one direction and then another, and night coming on?

The wind must be rising. The thunder sounds nearer. A real spring storm.

Lost, drenched and miserable, shall we look at each other in sudden panic to find that we are as strange to each other as the bewildering black tree trunks, and that the grasp of our hands has become cold and numb? And then shan't we be wishing for broad, sunny meadows, or the pine-knots burning on the hearth, the

IN THE COUNTRY

rain only blowing in at the window with a perfume fresh as lilacs and honeysuckle?

I wish you were here to-night, coming in with a gust at the door, the way you used to. I want desperately right now to see if you look like a stranger. I want you to come in with the rain making black your brown hair and running off the end of your nose (you always insisted on taking a storm bareheaded), and I'd like to know whether the clasp of your hand is cold and chilling. To-night I'm almost afraid it would be. Something makes me shiver and close the window.

Tom must have gone on dozing, for he didn't bring the wood, and my fire is down to embers. The wind really has risen. It is rumbling in the chimney now, whipping the fire into blue and yellow flickers, and starting little whirlwinds in the ashes. Sometimes I can hear the rain hiss down on the coals. I used to love a thunder storm.

I wonder if we are big enough for your theory. How great is our faith in it? How much would we endure for it? How much do without? Can faith master a tempest—a wild wind blowing through the soul?

LETTERS TO A LADY

A shutter outside has broken loose and is slamming. The naked twigs of the oak-tree are scraping against the wall. They sound like fingers. I can see them through the window, whirled and twisted in the rain.

I must go and see if Tony is warm.

If I do come to New York you'll have a wire before this reaches you. We may snatch an afternoon together. I shall have such a short time there.

My light has gone out, but there are candles. The thunder is almost constant now.

The windows are flaring squares of white, and I can see by the lightning the branches of the trees like a running sea.

I hope we can hear an orchestra. Beauty out of chaos.

Oh——!

That one clove to the heart of a pine-tree! I can see the red flames wind around it. Now they are smudged in smoke. Now they soar upward, whipped and twisted, into the night. They light the limbs of trees about them that sway like a chorus of the Furies.

Paul, I am afraid.

CAROLINE.

IN THE COUNTRY

TELEGRAM

PINKVILLE, KENTUCKY,
April 13, 1925.

If convenient meet me Pennsylvania Station
Tuesday noon twelve-thirty.

Caroline.

THORPE, BIDWELL & Co.,
Thursday. 10 A. M.

Dear Caroline:

I can get off at one to-day. Can't you meet me
at Peg Woffington's for lunch and let me have the
afternoon and evening—alone—with Cousin
Bessie!

The messenger will wait for your answer.

Please!

Paul.

Dear Paul:

Peg Woffington's. One-fifteen. Without impedimenta.

Caroline.

P. S. I want awfully to see "Processional."

C.

NEW YORK,
April 26, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Vor Sonnenaufgang—I haven't been abed
yet, and the tall black factory-chimneys are
smoking languidly against the dull rose of dawn.
You are not half-way home yet, and I am writing
to you only because I can't sleep—you are

LETTERS TO A LADY

still so much here. For the last hour I have been standing with elbows on my window-sill, at my western window, peering into the dusk, wondering whether you could be sleeping, while I, in a kind of auditive trance, still listened, still heard so distinctly, the far-away roar of your train receding into the West, sundering us, leaving us cold communicants again, with no other sacrament than written speech, which somehow never quite comes alive.

But I have turned away now to write this at my eastern window, hoping to warm my heart at the red rim of the sun when it plumps up over Long Island. As I look out over the miles of roofs, the sleeping city seems to shiver under its light mist. We—the city and I—feel a little chilly and gray. The street-lamps over there by the elevated, which at night are a misty yellow, now look like a stiff row of big white tulips, frigid, futile, foolish—in the “morning after.”

It is just five hours and fifteen minutes since we said good-by in the Pennsylvania Station. You disliked my remembering your profile! So, when we parted in the train, I tried to memorize your face in the “melting mood,” in the

IN THE COUNTRY

dusk of the vestibule—where I could not see any glint of whatever mockery may have lurked in your eyes. But when I left the station, by some cursed perversity, all that I could visualize was the head of the redcap who carried your handbag in, and his silly grin when I gave him my last dollar bill. That intrusive redcap seemed to etch himself on my retina, and you, I couldn't see at all.

"Let's walk," I said to myself, remembering John Finley's spring call to pilgrims, and thinking of the things I could dream through again as I sauntered through the Holy Land, between Thirty-Third Street and 125th. That proved a good plan, for I hadn't a penny in my pocket. And, besides, I walked the redcap out of my eyes; and when I had walked out of the riot of our White Lights, I began to recover you—first your eyes, and their way of weeping without tears.

Tears—like most men—I hate. Caroline, if there were not a hundred other good reasons, I should like you "rather a lot" for this: you are the only woman I ever knew who weeps enchantingly—just the spirit and soul and delicate wraith of weeping, with no visible tears,

LETTERS TO A LADY

with only a swiftly passing mist, which makes what was bright kind, or seem kind. My uneasy faith clings to the thought that when we parted you looked as you would have looked if you had been a little sorry to go.

First your eyes. And then, as I walked—walking now on the dusky west side of the Avenue under the white cherry blossoms of the park, that we passed together, just yesterday—as I walked, there began to beat through my brain a rhythm, and then phrases and lines and half lines of a poem which I used to love when I was eighteen, and which came wandering back through my experience at thirty, with the haunting sweetness and pathos of a remembered perfume: Stephen Phillips's "Apparition."

Do you remember?

"She is not happy! As I walked,
Of her I was aware.
She cried out, like a creature hurt,
Close by me in the air.

And then:

"And she was kind to me and sweet,
She had her ancient way;
Remembered how I liked her hand
Amid my hair to stray."

IN THE COUNTRY

But mostly I kept trying to reconstruct that stanza about God giving her one hour to spend on earth with the man whom, as Aldous Huxley would say, "she liked rather a lot." They debated how they should spend their hour. One of them says, "Why, as of old." For the life of me, I can't recall the music of the stanza, but the last line goes like this: "And so we quarrelled as of old."

As I walked, as I walked, thinking of how we had spent our week, which Jim, not God, had given us, that sad little poem kept brushing against my own memories like a branch of white cherry blossoms. Others before us have wasted the irrecoverable. What a mixed, queer, miserable, happy, ambiguous, distressing week?

How we wasted the first two terrible evenings at your cousin's house, you talking, I talking, and neither of us saying anything! How we had to waste the daytimes, I fuming at the office, you hunting up gowns and hats and heaven knows what not, to dazzle the Monday Club, and squandering all the lucid intervals of your dreadfully efficient mind on the business of Jim's Uncle Peter's estate! How we improved all that, on the sunny afternoon when we dis-

LETTERS TO A LADY

covered that forsythias are yellow in Riverside Park! Thursday night we were beginning—just beginning—to cease being strangers, to be really acquainted again, weren't we?—at “Processional,” and before it particularly, when tête-à-tête, you spoke to me with your eyes, over the cup of coffee which you were pouring for me—not Jim; and I replied in the same dialect; and then, suddenly, we began to talk, both of us, intelligently and well, about the great “theory.”

Then Friday and “Aïda.” How we had counted on it for enriching all the tone and color of our experiment! And how it failed us! Or we failed it. Or was it only I that failed? I am sorry. I am sorrier than words can express to remember how my inexplicable sullen fit spoiled all that beauty. But I know now how it took place. It all comes drifting back—the wreckage of that evening, the splinters of that quarrel.

My curious jealousy—of the opera! My hideous rage at the radiancy of your pleasure, as I glanced at you sidelong, near the end of the second act. My flashing recollection of your last letter, full of the thunder-storm in Ken-

IN THE COUNTRY

tucky. My stabbing intuition that it wasn't really I at all but New York and the opera—music, splendor, grace—that brought you to the city. My sense that I was then, always had been, always should be, incidental. My sharp vision of myself as a self-deluded ass—and the brutal way that I began to mutter it to you, through the singing. You, first surprised, then hurt, then frozen.

Oh, I see every step of it now, from the moment the moonlight glimmered on the Nile to the moment when we stood at your cousin's door at midnight, and I was saying in the most toneless voice I could command: "Well, I suppose this may as well be good-night and good-by." And you said, "It had much better be good-by," and went in without another word.

And then . . . Next day, yesterday evening, when I knew the last train had left the city, supposed you were on it, self-tormentingly had not gone down to it, and was sitting here consumed with blue corrosive passions—absolutely smouldering in chagrin, rage, rebellion, disgust, despair—abruptly, a sharp knock at my door, and I rose, swearing, bent on throwing whoever was there down stairs, and met—you!

LETTERS TO A LADY

As I walked, as I walked, and had got almost back to 125th Street, I began to think of some reasons for being unhappy again. But I still clung to this: that after you told me you had been inspired to take the midnight train and to go by way of Washington, I said: "Do you hate me now as much as before?" And you, smiling, replied, in what I instantly thought the most exquisitely witty answer ever given: "Just as much as before!"

There comes the sun! May it reach you soon.

PAUL.

DEAR PAUL:

May 3, '25.

We are rushing down from the tops of mountains, following a tossing water in a deeply carved, ancient bed.

I want to write you now, because this day I think of as still yours, and to-morrow—to-morrow will be different. But I shall probably hold my letter till I have heard from you.

There is always something that stirs me to meditation in a long railway journey alone. Contemplation is natural, I suppose, because

IN THE COUNTRY

action is impossible. The world outside is forever passing by, and the regular rumble and click of the rails forms a rhythm for flowing thoughts. It is the best place in the world for an adjustment of emotions, next to a hermitage within earshot of some stream pouring down the sides of the Himalayas.

Why did I say the Himalayas? Perhaps because my thoughts have had a mystical coloring to-day.

I woke up this morning reluctantly, wincing away from some dark shape that seemed to stand just inside the gates of consciousness. But sunlight was relentless. Slowly, confusedly, I recognized that figure as the shadow of our parting, as an ache carried over from last night —the memory of your face, dim in the vestibule of the train, and the tremble of your handclasp as you bade me good-by. I arose with that feeling tugging at me, dragging at my limbs with a heaviness that no physical exhaustion ever caused.

But then it began to lift. We were passing through the Shenandoah Valley under the morning sun. Broad and serene it stretched

LETTERS TO A LADY

back toward the sea. High pastures were fresh with the new green of spring; woods were delicately veiled with it; and in them, as we climbed, the flowering dogwood branches were like slanting rays of sunlight through a mist.

Do you remember a passage in a book we both like? It tells how Clara Middleton, standing under a wild-cherry-tree, looked up through its showering, drooping clusters of white flowers which took on a faint color, as the Alpine snows; how, for an instant, it was transfigured to “angel-crowded” space. To Meredith the tree was a symbol. A phrase or two sticks in my mind—

“A spirit born of a tree.
Huntress of things worth pursuit
Of souls; in our naming, dreams.”

Why do these words twist themselves into some floating, fragmentary strains of “Aïda,” I wonder? Aïda! How you disappointed me that night, Paul! Dragged me from the heaven of music down to earth! Jealousy strikes deeper than parting. It is, in a manner, parting—that no change of place can remedy. After that abrupt good-by, when I had gone up to

IN THE COUNTRY

sleeplessness, I seemed drowned in waves of anger and humiliation. A childish quarrel? But it took on the proportions of a loss of faith. I was seized with a kind of helpless rage. At you, Paul, but not at you alone. At myself, too, and all this miserable silly humanity which dreams of godhood and cannot stand erect. To think we walk with gods and find we are no better than the beasts—that there are no gods. Only theorists! Oh, Paul, were you disappointed, too—in that way? Or did you merely regret the inartistic ending to our week?

The next day, my last! There were eleventh-hour things to do, and there was conversation to make, brittle shining talk over the surface of a hardening inner resolution not to go away without another effort to lift wings.

Last night. . . .

All I remember is that the quarrel was gone, and anger, and humiliation. All I remember is a deep content, serene as these flowering valleys. . . .

Well, the day is over. The slanting rays of the sun are copper on the valleys that broaden as we wind downward. In the woods the dog-

LETTERS TO A LADY

wood is giving way to blurs of redbud; but I can hardly see them now, for the lights have come on inside.

CAROLINE.

Several Days Later

Jim met me, beaming, in the early morning. But, as usual when driving, he was brief. "Trip satisfactory?" he asked, as we whirled away. "Very." He smiled at me out of the tail of his eye. "In every way?" "Oh, yes." After a long time, just as we entered the woods: "Paul think so, too?" "I don't know," I said. (And after reading your letter, I still don't know.)

The road was checkered with shadows. Off in the thick of the wood I heard a pewee. Then suddenly we rounded a bend into the sunlight and burst upon a glory that almost lifted me from my seat. The apple orchard was a blowing cloud, delicately flushed with pink, sweet-scented, fresh as dawn.

CAROLINE.

NEW YORK,

May 10, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

By parcel post, insured, I am sending you the fine Italian briar which you apparently left in

IN THE COUNTRY

my room by mistake, and which is undoubtedly intended for Jim. I made the two foregoing inferences promptly when I discovered the little package on my divan under the sofa pillows where you were sitting a week ago Saturday; because the pipe is the exact duplicate of the one you gave me that evening, and I cannot suppose you meant to give me two. Mine, I have already begun to break in—indeed, am smoking it at this moment. Since I am going in for realistic detail, I will add that I have already cracked the bit a little by biting on it too hard when it dawned on me that you must have bought the other pipe for Jim at the same time that you bought mine for me, and that you will probably kiss the mouthpiece and tell Jim to think of you every time he lights it—just as you did for me.

I have your train letter. I ought to say I am glad that you are safe home, glad that Jim met you all right, glad that you have been out to see the apple blossoms in Jim's orchard, etc.—and glad that you are happy. But, Caroline, as a matter of fact—since we are going in for realism—I am not glad. As a matter of fact, your letter, presenting so vividly to my imagi-

LETTERS TO A LADY

nation the early-morning-blossom-scented restoration of you to the “bosom” of your family —to your *home* and household and all the dear round of daily familiarities—left me cold and wretched.

I am not glad that you are safe home: I want you here. I am not glad that you are happy in the delightfulness of May on the plantation: I should have been much better satisfied if you had lied to me a little, and had said you were miserable, and that the apple orchards had lost their fragrance—and two or three pages more of such divinely comforting nonsense.

You were sweet to me that Saturday—and kind, inexpressibly. I know that I am unreasonable not to be content with that. And the first part of the letter which you wrote in the train, letting me know that I was with you there—the poor, ghostly devoted memory of me—in your mind and heart, filling them, for the time, as you dreamed along on that bright Sunday morning through “the flowering dogwood,” of the Shenandoah Valley—that made me beatifically happy.

I know I ought to be content with these memories. But I am not. I should not, ought

IN THE COUNTRY

not, wish to occupy your mind now, when I know that it is both your duty and your desire and your intention to be occupied wholly and heartily with your own family, and to give them now *all* that sweetness and that kindness which I had for a little while. I ought not to wish now to be more than an occasional presence in your consciousness. The unshunnable fact is that I do. Wish it perturbingly.

You have given me all that you could give—according to our “theory.” It is not enough.

It doesn’t work out as it should, our theory. Oh, no doubt it’s working out very well with you, and you are quite tranquilly, “like a well conducted lady,” as Thackeray so devilishly said of Charlotte, cutting Tony’s bread and butter. But there’s no reciprocity—or mutuality, which is it?—about this tranquillity. I am as tranquil as a luna—lunatick?—moth trying to bore a hole through a window-pane. My imagination writes letters to you all day long when I ought to be writing advertising; and I, who quit dreaming five years ago, have dreamed about you every night since you were here.

LETTERS TO A LADY

What are you doing in my dreams? We used to chat so comfortably on the open veranda of our—souls. But now you have gone into some subterranean chamber, carrying a torch, and you have scattered sparks, and—well, the ship's in mid-ocean and the coal bunkers are on fire.

What I think now, at this minute, is that our theory was orchidaceous.

To be perfectly square with you, I'll have to tell you I've had a vision these last three or four days, which has somehow destroyed the orchidaceous values we were trying to establish, just as the war extinguished a lot of our day-dreams. I've seen "Grass." Do you remember, we thought we would, and then we thought we wouldn't, spend one of our priceless evenings on it? I wish now we had seen it together. But I have seen it now alone, and my vision came out of it—cold, clear, inexorable.

"Grass" is a picture of what life is in its naked elements. Fifty thousand Baktyari, a pastoral people grazing their flocks between the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf. They live on their goats and sheep and cattle. The cat-

IN THE COUNTRY

tle live on the grass. The grass dies—God having seen fit to send no rain. The fifty thousand, accustomed to deal with realities, rise, shoulder the babies in their wooden cradles, shoulder the lambs and the young calves, and march, march, march day after day, night after night, through fiery sand, through icy rivers, floating on their bellies on inflated goatskins, pushing the panic-stricken, drowning beasts through swirling torrents, over rocks, through waist-deep snow, up icy, impassable Alpine mountains, over the desperate ridge and down into the valley—to grass.

I can't tell you how thrilling it was—how it shouted to one's sickly, over-civilized sense what we poor devils are really here for—the bed-rock terms on which the President of the Immortals allows us to live.

Do you see what I mean? Caroline, I want that kind of a stake in life, and I'm going to have it. I want a woman—mine!—who will take *my* baby in his cradle on her back and carry him over the mountains, if need be, while I am carrying the cattle, *our* cattle. This is the way I care for you. How do you care for me?

PAUL.

LETTERS TO A LADY

PINKVILLE,
May 17, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

Thank you for so graciously sending on my pipe. I have not yet bestowed it according to your suggestion. Perhaps I shan't. If Jim keeps on in this irritating and unreasonable humor, I shall like as not, in exasperation—smoke it myself.

But to-day is a sparkling Sunday morning, and Jim is away for the whole day, Tony with him, gone up the river to look at some land. We have the whole bright earth. What shall we do with it? I caught up a handful of your letters and started for the swamp, to a spot I know where the marsh marigolds stud the edge of a pool with yellow. At thought of the fun I'd have with you I was in a dancing mood. Ridiculously, I kept singing to myself "Wait for the Wagon," a refrain out of childhood. I was in a hurry to begin my little private ritual, my processional of delightful memories, with the Epistles of Paul to prompt them. But right away my eye fell on this—"I am not glad that you are happy: I should have been much better satisfied if you had lied a little." Dog in the manger!

IN THE COUNTRY

Are you sure you know, *chéri*, when I am lying? . . .

I must have been sitting very still these last few minutes, forgetting to write. A redwing dipped close to me, as if I were not here, and then swerved so low that I could see his reflection in the water. . . .

Where were we? Oh, yes. You were going in for "life in its naked elements," for the "bed-rock terms on which the President of the Immortals allows us to live," and for toting babies and cattle over mountain passes as a means of solving fundamental problems.

It sounds heroic. But somehow I am not quite so enthusiastic about it as you are. It's not so new to me. Come to think about it, maybe you were right when you said that women were not so over-civilized (or was it highly civilized?) as men. In general we're constantly up against such elementary things as "cutting bread and butter," sometimes having made it first, patching and darning, and rescuing children from breaking their necks. (Tony tried to fly from the top of the wood-pile yesterday.) You see I've already cooked over a fireplace and acquired chilblains wash-

LETTERS TO A LADY

ing out clothes in an unheated hut. I've written letters for men who had no hands, and I've listened for the engine of a transport to miss a beat while a long bundle was slipped into the waves at the stern.

Bed-rock isn't so attractive. It ought to be kept covered, whenever possible, with a pleasant vegetation. It is only to be endured for the sake of something—or some one—very dear. Nevertheless, I agree with you that an occasional sight of it is salutary.

And if you really want it, if you are determined to have it, as you insist you are, of course it is to be had. There are great outcroppings of it near here in the hills, where people manage to live almost stripped of unessentials.

Obviously what you really insist on in your letter is a wife, and, to tell you the truth, I feel a little conscience-stricken about that. It's been on my soul for some time that I ought to find you one. Some lady with imagination who is tired of beautiful thoughts and has a yearning to touch the primordial basis of living—to cook and sew and rescue children. There are several possibilities I've thought of, but somehow each of them has one flaw or another.

IN THE COUNTRY

Do you know, as I think it over, Paul, it seems to me that you and I are not really after just the same thing. I've been living on bread-and-butter reality for quite a while now, and I'm looking for something else, for subtleties and harmonies and beautiful shadings. You, on the other hand, who have been dealing chiefly in such unsubstantial things as ideas, now discover that you want to touch earth.

Well, the earth is tempting to-day. Through the new fine foliage over my head the sunshine comes drifting until I am fairly soaked with its warmth. I do wish you were here. Just as hard as I can, I am trying to think you here, laughing at me a little with one side of your mouth, but very grave with the other. Let's pile the pillows more comfortably against our log, and then "let's pretend."

"Let's play like" we really had decided to go in for fundamental realities. You have left New York and come back to the mountains, a long way from the railroad. You might buy the farm that, say, Simon Clark had to leave when his still was discovered. The cabin is rather dilapidated and has only two rooms, but

LETTERS TO A LADY

there is a cowshed and a pig-pen and a good spring not too far away. It won't take you long to put the house in good condition and maybe build on another room if you can handle an axe. You can, of course.

As soon as that's done, I'll join you. It is just the place for an elopement, because the particular social convention in question is easily overlooked by the neighbors up there. They consider other things more important.

We shan't be able to have much garden at first, but we can get a cow and have plenty of milk; and, in spite of my dislike for chickens, I can bring myself to raise them.

I'd better learn how to milk. That's always considered woman's work in that part of the country, and we don't want to seem queer. Anyhow, you won't have been having much practice lately, just taking bottles out of a dumb-waiter. And I'll carry water up the hill from the spring for the washing and scrubbing, but you'll have to keep us in firewood, and butcher a hog when we need meat. Do you suppose you'll like to butcher?

"Of an evening," when the cow and the pigs have been fed, you can write poetry, if you're

IN THE COUNTRY

not too sleepy, while we both sit in front of the fire smoking our twin briar pipes.

I wonder if you'll like it. I wonder. And if you'll like me then, looking like a mountain woman. I shouldn't be surprised if you deserted me.

That, you dear, doleful fundamentalist, is getting down to bed-rock in the way you suggest. It is still entirely possible, even in America, and it might work better than our "theory." But it really isn't facing what constitutes for us the "naked elements" of life any more than the theory did. For us just now the "realities" are these two inescapable facts: We "like each other rather a lot," and I am (more or less) happily married to a man who happens to be your friend. Twist them and turn them and ignore them as much as we please, they are still there at the bottom of the whole mess.

So what stares us in the face is not the problem of getting cattle to grass, but that of modifying one or the other of these facts until they fit. That's bed-rock. The other is romance.

Nevertheless . . .

CAROLINE.

LETTERS TO A LADY

NEW YORK,
May 24, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

I sit at your feet, my dear, rebuked, humbled, contrite, penitent, assuaged, soothed, and mystified withal, like a savage bear, by the incantations you wove about me in your letter written in the swamp by the pool where the marsh marigolds are. You are so rich in all enchantments when you unclose your heart a little, and I stand in such a poverty of grace, that I cannot struggle against your will, though it offers me hemlock. I follow your magical pipes wherever they lead me, as the poor shipwrecked Ferdinand followed the music which crept by him on the waters, "allaying both their fury and his passion."

How I wish I were actually sitting there to-day, in my own Kentucky, whose spring-time spell you so obviously begin to feel, and to mingle with your own!—or even here, say up at Spuyten Duyvil, where I sat an hour ago, dreaming *we* were there, in this soft, sun-warmed delicious Saturday afternoon in mid-May, you backed against an oak, I looking up—as I always do to you—with my head among the violets, under the covert of your kindness,

IN THE COUNTRY

of which I am never quite sure except when I can see the soft play of your eyes above the malice of your smile—I looking up betimes, or looking thoughtfully out, watching the gray shivers run up the river, feeling the cool, damp greenness steal like aconite into my veins, and listening to your wisdom falling clear and cold as spring water *from a rock*, into the murmuring hollows of my heart.

You have answered my question, touching on the raw, I suppose, as gently as was compatible with the application of common sense to my inflamed egotism. Yes, I did nearly spoil it all, with my hydrophobic barking of the first personal pronoun possessive, up the trees of private property and “primitive” passions. Moods, moods: to get rid of moods is the beginning of wisdom, and of prose, and of civilized life.

But please do not think me such a fool as you so airily sketched me. Hear my *peccavi*—hear me confess like a six-year child. I know that I was absurd. I acknowledge that I am a poor man. I admit that my patrimonial estate is forty unprofitable acres on the outskirts of Pinkville, yielding me under the present tenant

LETTERS TO A LADY

\$450 annually, which I now supplement by a salary enabling me just to maintain a \$200 balance at my bank, provided that I do not attempt to pay last month's bills before the first of next month. I will confess now that your coming to New York last month, instead of my making the contemplated "flying visit" to Kentucky, saved me from "the rocks." It is true, absolutely true, that if you stepped out onto the "bed-rock" of economic reality with me, leaving the verdure and the fat alluvial soil and the "improvements" which conceal the substructure upon which you and the other Adult dwell, I could offer you nothing half so commodious and airy as Simon Clark's two-room cabin in the mountains.

Yes, you have answered my question. I think I understand you. You are willing to walk with me in the woods, on an off afternoon, and tell me fairy-tales, and listen to mine. But as a provider of "food, shelter and clothing," you can't take me seriously.

How serious is a man who can't be taken seriously in that capacity? The day after you were here I happened to notice with a start of recognition the rocky spine of Manhattan

IN THE COUNTRY

Island which juts out in Central Park. That set me to thinking of all these millions of people in large simple outlines. A day or two later, taking a long walk up from the Battery, it flashed on me that of the three proud avenues of the city through which I had passed one may be described as a grocery store, one as a clothing store and one as a dormitory. I went musing along on the text which bids us take no thought for the morrow, what we shall eat, or wherewithal we shall be clothed. It is a true poet's text.

Yes, you have answered me: you *do* take thought for the morrow. And you take me, as a provider for the morrow, with so little seriousness that—that what?—that you propose shipping me “down the river,” like a rebellious and unprofitable slave. I refer to your cool, not to say cold-blooded, suggestion that you have neglected your duty of providing me with a wife, and must be looking around for a suitable person to darn my socks.

Must it come to that? Oh, well, there is a young widow of excellent figure and well-to-do, I'll warrant, who comes every morning, in most fetching mourning with pink silk stockings, to

LETTERS TO A LADY

give her dog a run in Riverside Park. Having saved the dog's life, or at least his ear, from an ill-bred vagrant of his species, I know the lady, a little, and meet her occasionally. Do you advise me to cultivate the acquaintance?

I began this letter in a very good temper, but I'm getting into a very bad one, and I'm going to stop before it grows any worse.

Caroline, I've been going over your letters, as you did mine in the swamp. It seems to me that we have been good for each other up to this point—that we have drawn out each other's music, made each other better instruments for whatever hand may touch our strings. To me, at any rate, you have grown steadily more precious, and, I have thought, indispensable. But it may be that we have exhausted our mutual usefulness, exhausted the adventure, exhausted all the interest that can be turned up in the mere discovery of a static relationship. After this point, perhaps the interest would die, since it cannot grow, since it is not fed, since it cannot be fed with meat and drink but must pallidly subsist on "something else, subtleties, harmonies, and beautiful shadings"—your own phrase. I loathe with all my

IN THE COUNTRY

soul the thought of a slow death by inani-tion.

You are quite, quite right, my dear: I *don't* know when you are "lying."

But if you really think we are in for a part-ing, let's, do let's, part now, while it hurts.

PAUL.

PINKVILLE,
May 31, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

A drowsy clouded Sunday afternoon, the kind that always makes me restless, with waves of dull light and darkness, with Jim dozing, Tony asleep, and the house empty of the chatter of the servants. I've been wandering about forlornly, picking up this book, or that paper, only to put them down again. Several times I have gone to my desk, forgetting that there is no letter from you to answer—I can't guess why. But there are many things to say, so, almost involuntarily, I find myself replying to what never came with what shall not go.

It has been an off week, a horrid week, and I am lonesome and want to grouse a bit—safely, in a letter not destined to be read.

I never before realized how eagerly I have

LETTERS TO A LADY

come to look forward to the Wednesday morning mail, for this is the first time it has failed me. Thursday, Friday, Saturday I watched a bit breathlessly for Jim to come up the lane from the box, and it bothers me a little that I couldn't bring myself to say, just casually: "Anything for me this morning?" I could only try to keep from showing a disappointed face.

Were you really silly enough, old dear, to be angry at me for my raillery? Or did you just put off writing and then forget? Or are you ill? Anyhow, since this isn't going, I may confess that I'm a little concerned to realize how unhappy I am.

No letter, and Jim out of sorts. He is away most of the time, riding about the place, and when he does come in he is so polite that it is positively exhausting. Once or twice I've caught him looking at me rather miserably, but when I try to be nice to him he goes away. I reckon Jim's jealous, but it doesn't thrill me. It worries me.

It's really been a devil of a week, but to-day I awoke early to a shower of cardinal fluting, with the sun just slanting through the trees. I leaned out of the window into a morning so

IN THE COUNTRY

sweet and fresh that it might have been an Eden inside a gigantic drop of dew. I hurried, eager to get out into it, with the feeling that somehow this new week was to be washed of old perplexities with a sort of Lethean flood of sunlight and bird music.

There was a hushed, untrammelled air about things as I stepped out of doors, so that I went breathlessly at first, as if in fear of waking up the world. Down past the barn, where Webster was whistling softly as he curried Gypsy, and through the orchard to the pasture which dips down to the sugar maple grove—under one fence and over another, my shoulders wet from brushing the ground.

The grass was gray with untouched dew, and where I walked my feet made dark tracks in it. For a few minutes, from childish impulse, I amused myself stepping out a mystic circle. Did you ever notice what a flattering mirror the sunshine on dewy grass can make? Your features are blurred, and there is sure to be a brilliant halo all around your shadow—which is consoling. I climbed up on that old rail fence that lingers out of the past to mark the north boundary of the pasture. Its angles are

LETTERS TO A LADY

filled with weeds and wild roses, just coming open. They, too, were all frosted over with dew. . . .

“Pale, dew-drenched, half-shut roses gleam——”

As I sat there the moving sun plucked them out of shadow, one by one, and set them shining. I began to think how to put it into words for you, because you, more than any one, would understand the perfection of the morning, how complete it was, how its parts all fitted together, so that the high, sweet singing in the crisp green of the trees above was of the same texture as the glisten under foot. And you wouldn’t think me mad to want to sing, too, and race all the way home.

Jim was waiting for me—and for his breakfast—a little peevish. I tried to catch my breath and be sedate again, but it was really no good. The day was too heady.

“Let’s have a canter after breakfast,” I began. “It’s *such* a morning!”

Jim said something about its being a weather breeder because the shadows were so deep.

“I’ve been out as far as the pasture—and the wild roses are out——!”

IN THE COUNTRY

"I suppose you took Paul's letters along and have been mooning over them out there," he burst out.

It was a nasty remark. I told him so and he apologized, but I was hurt. The silver morning was so tarnished that I didn't even notice when the sky began to cloud over.

And when I thought of writing to you there wasn't any letter to answer——

.

Your letter reached me only to-day, and then by a strange route. This afternoon, as I was sitting here at my desk writing, Tom came to the door to ask for that suit of clothes "Mr. Jim" had promised him. He wanted to wear it to meeting to-night. (Tom is the preacher.) As Jim was asleep on the veranda, I went up to get it out of his closet. Knowing that he had worn the suit recently, I was careful to empty the pockets and found—your letter.
Comment later.

CAROLINE.

NEW YORK,

June 7, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

Don't go out where the cardinals are fluting,
and don't go crawling under fences in the dew!

LETTERS TO A LADY

It's awfully becoming to you, but it gets on my nerves!—if that is anything to you. You were very much in that last letter of yours—in a way. It was intensely you. But it was the volatile dancing spirit of you which belongs to nobody, and broods now like a bird on a hidden nest, and now sings at heaven's gate, "Catch me if you can." It was the same you that I have seen—oh, say fifty times—making those subtle little silken wrinkles in your eyelids, times when you were pretending to be taking me very seriously but were all laughter inside. It is when you are what you call happy that you puzzle and baffle me to desperation.

What are you happy about, you miserable wretch?

What bewilders me more than anything else in you is your ability to mix up in one letter having "a devil of a week" with singing at heaven's gate. Thank God, I'm a man, and when I am happy I know it, and when I am miserable I know that, too. I never weep for joy and I never laugh because my heart is breaking, but you do both, and I never can tell where one leaves off and the other begins.

Weeks ago, way back in March, we fell from

IN THE COUNTRY

talking about friendship to talking about love, as people from drinking spring water insensibly acquire a taste for wine; and you, as it seemed to me then, spoke ill and harshly of love, warning against it as “a blind groping for that which you may never reach: the inner life of some one else.”

I thought that didn’t have to be true for love, adult and civilized. It is only within these last few weeks that it has been at all clearly true for me. I thought I had no wish to grope for the inner life of any one else. I liked the thought that you were your own—had an innermost self which none of us could reach, which was not Tony’s, nor Jim’s and could never—I was glad of it—could never be mine, or any one else’s, but was a quite free spirit, which one could meet somewhere, as one meets the spirit of nature or poetry or a sunrise, outside the field of practical utilities and obligations.

I think I was right. But what I see now is, that no matter how many times I meet this dancing spirit of you, I shall never know it, never understand it, never be anything but tormented and tantalized by it—shall never in

LETTERS TO A LADY

any satisfying sense love it; and it begins to dawn on me rather bleakly that this free spirit of yours will never really love anything but its own joy. I don't mean to be mystical. I am simply seeing things very clearly. And I see more and more that the really attaching and permanently endearing things in people are all, or nearly all, associated in some way with those practical utilities and obligations.

You don't see what I mean? That is because you like yourself best crawling under fences in the dew! Will it be any clearer if I say that I am equally stirred by numberless homelier things, such as the way you handle a trowel in your garden; the way a lump of sugar slips from your finger-tips, without splashing, into a cup of coffee; the way you fold up and smooth out and put in a particular place a bit of sewing; your handwriting, the way you walk and the clean, sharp edge of your footprint in moist earth; an instantaneous way you have of saying and doing kind and gracious things for awkward people in your house; a peculiar deftness and rightness in your every motion when you are making Tony a sandwich on Sunday afternoon when the maids are out and you are

IN THE COUNTRY

wearing a long kitchen apron which, the moment you put it on, seems consecrated and lovelier than the draperies of a Grecian priestess making sacrifices to the gods.

It seems to me then that if I could live day by day among those deft and right and kind and gracious motions I could quite forego groping for the “inner life,” which is the ultimate source of them.

But here is a thing which interests me: The more the savage “possessive” element grows in my feeling for you; the more clearly I visualize the felicity of having your life permanently within my vision as something to count upon, like sunrise; the more I dream of sitting evening after evening in the firelight, you chatting, I watching your shadow on the wall—yes, dear, for that fatal “profile” and the proud lift of the chin which ruined me; the more my passion for “property” grows—why, singularly, just in proportion to all this grows my interest and sympathy and respect for the Present Proprietor! For all proprietors.

I speak crudely. I will speak in a parable. Now that June heat has smitten the city, we citizens who have no wild pastures begin to

LETTERS TO A LADY

run to the parks for air. I have tried it again and again. It doesn't do. I prefer to smother at home. Deep in my heart I discover a bitter, primitive, authentic, decisive loathing of parks and of the people who walk in them and of myself when I am one of them. A park is an abomination to me. I have just one sensation as I hurry through them: "What nice places these would be if one could only shut the people out!"

No man who has once understood the spiritual meaning of "property" ever "cuts across the grass" without more pain than the trespass comes to.

You and I have attempted an impracticable division: Owners of property and appreciators of it. Emerson and Don Marquis and people like that have written poems on walking through other people's fields and carrying off the "best harvest." But it is just—poetry.

Caroline, you and I are two butterflies that have been caught by a Boy, inadequately chloroformed, and impaled on a pin.

The Boy=The powers that be.

Inadequately chloroformed=Still conscious of fluttering wings.

IN THE COUNTRY

The pin=Jim.

You were, as I said, much in your last letter. So was Jim. For weeks he has been steadily growing more distinct there. Jim "forgot" to give you my last letter. Jim was in a bad temper. Jim went up the river Sunday morning in the boat with Tony and you stayed at home to reread my letters. Why did you tell me that? Was it to suggest how much more interested you were in me than in Jim and Tony? To save you from perplexities I will answer: It was not. All the morning, while you were sitting there with my letters in your lap, your mind was up the river, conjecturing what Jim was thinking, how he was "taking it"—and studying how much of a certain kind of pain was worth how much of an uncertain kind of pleasure. You take Jim with you every time you run away from him. It is transparent.

What *was* Jim thinking about, up the river in the boat, chattering with Tony? My guess is that he was thinking about his Property. And, to tell the truth, since you put into my mind that lonely image of him up there on the river, I've been sitting in the same boat, just as miserable, thinking about Property, my own

LETTERS TO A LADY

terribly "conservative" notions about property. And how I wish I were not so inalienably

Yours,

PAUL.

PINKVILLE,

June 14, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

What am I happy about? I hardly know. A host of things—just things generally. The intense green and blue outside. The Baltimore Belle roses in a glorious tangle all about my dooryard. The rain that fell after a long drought, running down the rough bark of the trees, washing clean the leaves and the air, gushing in little bubbling made-for-the-occasion rivers down the lawn into the road. My own body. The hot sun on my shoulders in the garden. The shock of cold water. The mere delight of moving muscles. Just breathing. Even pain. Even the sharp, clean twinge I felt when I turned my ankle on the doorstep the other day and fell headlong into the honeysuckle vine.

I suppose when one is turned in the direction of happiness, everything gives him a little push along the way—even the thrust of a pin as if through a butterfly still fluttering. I am glad we are inadequately chloroformed. Things

IN THE COUNTRY

make me happy because they make me feel so much alive. And life goes to my head a little.

And then I am happy because you—if I say because you too are inadequately chloroformed, you will think me cruel. It isn't that. Your writhings could never rejoice me. And yet I am glad that you too are conscious, not only of the pin, but of yourself—and of me.

Would you forego consciousness to avoid being hurt? It's something of a philosophic choice.

Which brings up the whole subject of value and cost and property. All property is not alike. (My letter begins to sound like a lecture in economics.) I think they usually divide it into "real" and "personal," don't they? Which kind am I? But there should be added another class, which might be called "personality" property. It consists of our holdings in the personalities of our friends. Different from all other kinds of property, it requires different handling. It can't be bought nor sold nor given away "for keeps." It is a little like sunshine, for it goes and comes as it will and if you try to close it in with four thick walls and a roof, why, when you look for it inside, it is gone.

LETTERS TO A LADY

That is the real significance of your phrase "the spiritual meaning of property," or perhaps I should say, to be accurate, "the meaning of spiritual property."

Even in the field of "practical utilities," of gardening, and pouring coffee, and kitchen aprons, neither Jim nor Tony can have sole proprietorship, though Tony, by right of helplessness, has a strong claim on me. (May heaven fend me from ever feeling that I own my son!) And if Jim, as he sits evening after evening in the firelight, as you wish you might do, listening to my desultory chatter, watching my shadow on the wall—if Jim should begin to think that these things belong to him alone, and to his heirs and assigns, forever, the stream of chatter would soon run dry, and shadow would be all that was left to him.

Besides, ownership is costly. You might like my gestures, or the print of my foot, but pretty soon you would begin to pay for them by having to endure my irritating little way of—. But I'm hardly firm-minded enough to call your attention to that!

Nevertheless, your share in me is not inconsiderable, Paul. I try to send you large ship-

IN THE COUNTRY

ments of me in all my letters, and there is more for you, were you only here. If there is graciousness of speech and manner in me for any one, how surely is it there for you ! And if you were here to use them, all my sandwich-making capacities would be at your command.

Let's not discard the "theory" yet, Paul, for at bottom it is sound. If my relationship to Jim is unique, so is that to you. They are by no means as like as twin briar pipes. What if there is that between Jim and me which you can never share ? You are not in the position of a mendicant receiving only what another doesn't want—you have that in me which he, by his very nature, can hardly know exists. The sum of it is, I love you both !

I won't say equally, for how can love be measured ? It isn't a commodity, like soda or salt. Rather it is like the blessing of the shramaṇa in the old Buddhist tale—given without stint, the store increases with the giving. It is like the contents of the pitcher of Baucis and Philemon. The more of it I pour out for Jim, the more I have for you. Capacity for affection increases with its use.

Perhaps it is love for you both that makes

LETTERS TO A LADY

me love so well the things—the scent of the honeysuckle as it ascends to my window on the night air, the smell of the rain, the rough, wet surface of the trunks of trees, the prick of thorns and—pins. Even tobacco-setting in this season of emergency, sitting on the planter feeding the tender, round-leaved plants into it, the sun pouring thickly down on my shoulders, my garments clinging to me, hot and wet.

Poor Jim has been so worried with his shearing and his crop that he was 'most distraught. He couldn't set the tobacco until it rained, and the plants were getting almost too old. Then the rain came, a blessed flood of it, and with it came the rush. Everybody in the county was working at top speed. No extra hands were to be had. So I volunteered.

It is rather exhausting work, as you no doubt remember, and at dusk we are both cramped and tired. We drag somewhat listlessly into the house, and then we usually make for the swimming-hole that Jim contrived in the old stone-quarry behind the hill just back of the house. Its sides are dark with moss and twilight, and rows of little turtles slip off into the water as we make the plunge.

IN THE COUNTRY

I suppose you wouldn't like the planting, Paul. I suppose you went to New York to escape all that, but I know you would love the swimming-hole—the cold, wet moss on its rocky sides, the willows almost tumbling into it, the dead white reflection of the sky, where a little light remains awhile after it has left all the rest of the world, a still reflection broken only by our silently swimming bodies. I wish we might find you some evening sitting among the turtles ready to slip in with us when we come down through the brake. I do wish it.

CAROLINE.

NEW YORK,

June 21, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

I have no illusions about you, and yet—
“Oh, *haven’t* you?”—That is your part. (Distinctly, as if you were within the reach of my hand, not a thousand miles away, I see you softly, swiftly lowering the “fringed curtains of your eyes,” three-quarters of the way down, till their too-bright light is veiled. I see in your eyelids that familiar little silken *crinkling* which means malicious mockery. And I

LETTERS TO A LADY

feel, I think, precisely like a foolish young man who has come by moonlight with his guitar into a Southern garden, damp with dew and intoxicating with jasmine, honeysuckle and Cherokee roses, and dazzling with the lamp and the face at the window, framed by the glimmering night and the light-splashed vines. And just as he strikes the first chord for his serenade, bang! down goes the curtain, leaving him in the dusk of the garden, transfixed by one thin golden blade of light. But wait!)

I have no illusions about you. As a matter of actual fact, you care so little for me that you hurt my personal pride horribly. You care a great deal *more* for Jim, in a substantial, conservative way; but you care so little even for him—in the high devotional sense of “caring”—that you hurt my generic masculine sensibilities by that, almost as much as you wound my *amour propre* by your essential indifference to me. You don’t even care for Tony as I have been taught to understand that mothers, even tiger-mothers, care for their young. What you really care for, as I said the other day, is just your own consciousness of joy, your own intense

IN THE COUNTRY

sensation of being yourself, however you get it—swimming in the stone-quarry, reeking on the tobacco-planter, or tumbling head-first into a bramble-bush.

I have no illusions about you; and yet it is just because I know that you are *real*—and not my dream—that you differ so—so imperatively from all the other shapes that my fancy has fashioned since I was fifteen. Do you remember, some time ago we began to exchange confidences on this point: whether at thirty the quality and “symptoms” of what old Burton called “the lover’s melancholy” are different, in any notable way, from what they were at fifteen? I think you denied that there was any particular “evolution.” Your first “attack” seems to have been as real as the one to which you succumbed.

It was not so with me. Always, before, the “interesting person” was merely a keynote, a bit of melody, a motif, which it was my part to develop imaginatively into an elaborate musical composition of my own, to which I am certain that her ears were deaf. She was merely a device by which I hypnotized myself.

LETTERS TO A LADY

She was merely the key by which I let myself into the enchanted garden of an harmonious mood. In one of these gardens the “interesting person” figured as Elegy, in another as Romance, in a third she moved like an Elizabethan shepherdess in the atmosphere of some old golden pastoral, and all my desire of her was to sit with her forever, upon the rocks, “watching the shepherds feed their flocks.”

Naturally, the “interesting person” soon lost interest, and the spell snapped.

I have no illusions about you. I didn’t dream you. I didn’t create you “out of endless yearning.” I don’t idealize you. My fancy hasn’t altered a strand of your hair or remolded by a hair’s breadth one of your features, physical, mental, or moral. I can’t imagine myself taking such liberties with them. Often you seem to me like a rock—you are so relentlessly yourself, so self-contained, so, in a certain sense, unconcessive, so impenetrably you. If I find you I have to go where you are. If I reach you I have to climb to you. You may come to the gate, so to speak, and let me in, but when I am there it is your garden, your house; and everything in it is yours, and no

IN THE COUNTRY

creation or illusion of mine. You are unvanquishably your own hard, bruising, defiant self.

And yet, I repeat, it is because I know you for what you are that, week by week, I look for your letter as a beleaguered city looks over the walls for the banner of a friendly power, as a shattered aviator lost in the Arctic ice looks for a relief expedition, as a lone traveller on a camel traversing the Sahara looks across the desert sands for green treetops and water.

Explain that, wretch!

Till I knew you I mostly thought of real life as something to put up with. I thought that all real life was like that. Yet I had read, often enough, of life that goes garlanded and dancing on earth, and soaring and singing, like a lark, in heaven. I had always supposed that was "poetry." Formerly.

You are real. The way I know it, Caroline, is this: Face to face as we were a couple of months ago, you are absolutely plausible and credible, even when you tell me fairy-tales. I don't see why. That is your mystery. But you are as real as sunlight.

Your letters—well, they are plausible the

LETTERS TO A LADY

first time I read them. Reread, they sometimes seem full of gaps through which one could drive a Blue Line bus. I think, for instance, that you steadily and stubbornly evade my point about Property, and simply make a specious play of words around it.

“Ownership is costly.” There you seem to have it! Indeed it is. But you don’t follow it up. Our entire theory depends on the detachability of what you call “personality property” from “personal” and “real” property. All my doubts about the validity of the theory are due to my sense that “personality property” is attached to “personal property” as inseparably as the soul is attached to the body.

A seductive idea of yours about the inexhaustibility of “spiritual wealth”: the more you give the more you have. A beautiful play of words. I can play the word-game, too. Listen: Love is a spring of never-failing water. Dipping doesn’t exhaust it. The more one dips, the more freely it flows.

The truth is, you haven’t walked around our “case.” You are content, wretch, with the undivided giving of two men, Jim and me. You are a cheerful recipient, wretch! But walk on!

IN THE COUNTRY

Walk on, realistically, a little further around our "case." You haven't been around it, you know, till you have supposed that Jim, instead of adhering to "undivided giving," divides his giving, as you maintain is practicable with spiritual treasure.

I mean, when a man begins to divide his affection, which we'll admit is inexhaustible, doesn't he infallibly, in the real world, begin also to divide his car, or need a second one, and to divide his ponies, or to buy a third one, and to distribute the jewels, or go to the expense of additional emeralds? Yes or no! And don't you, when you walk around the "case" in that way, find that, instead of running into "flimsy conventions," you bump solid and hard into economics and physics, including the tough old Newtonian principle that one body can't be in two places at the same time? Yes or no!

This is what Jim and I were thinking of in the boat up the river. Did you study physics at college? I did. I wish I hadn't. It left a permanent impress on me then, and now it depresses me terribly. Abysmally.

Let's stop arguing. I mean every word in this letter from the beginning to the end. But

LETTERS TO A LADY

since you have made it so clear that we are making Jim so utterly miserable, we can't go on. How can we?

PAUL.

PINKVILLE,

June 28, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

This is frankly an appeal—to your better nature—to the kind of man you used to be. But first, before I forget it, let me worry you a little about your farm.

Caroline and I rode over there this morning to see how Spencer was getting on with his crop. I'd been hearing around town that he was short of help because Bob, his oldest boy, was laid up.

We found Spencer in an upper field setting tobacco, late as it is. Bob, the clumsy lout, had fallen off a hayrick and broken his collar-bone. Spencer said he was better, but the accident put him behind with his work, and he didn't know how he was going to get caught up. Really, Paul, you ought to get hold of somebody else for the place. The man means well, but he simply can't handle it. He reckoned he'd planted more tobacco than he could

IN THE COUNTRY

tend. I reckoned he had, too. That fellow's too slow to stop quick, but this spring he got to-bacco-crazy, just like the rest of us fools, and ploughed up a lot more of your pasture. He even proposed cutting down your old beech grove to plant there too, but I put a stop to that.

Caroline wanted to ride down to the house and see Bob. We found him making the best of his excuse and loafing on the veranda. Mrs. Spencer saw us and came out to greet us, dipping snuff as she talked. We didn't go in, but I could see that they had a bed set up in the old living-room. The house is really looking pretty seedy, Paul. You ought to do something about it. The brick needs repointing, the front steps sag, and it could do with a lot of paint. To tell you the truth, it made me a little homesick to see the old place looking so run-down—no flowers, and some of the pines dying.

The barn's in pretty good condition, comparatively, but it ought to be painted. We went through the barnyard, heaped with rubbish, and crossed the creek. We found the ledge of overhanging rock on the hillside that

LETTERS TO A LADY

used to be king's palace or robbers' cave, as the occasion demanded. It was inhabited, even to-day—a little girl in a faded blue dress and two boys, all three barefoot, stopped playing to gaze at us with shy, friendly smiles. Caroline managed to get a few words out of them.

They might almost have been you and she and I in those days when she used to come to Pinkville to visit her mother's sister, impressive dame. When Caroline was brought to your house to spend the day, you always managed to get me over too. Caroline was no doubt too much for you alone. She usually arrived stiff and starched, and went home muddy and bedraggled, but in the meantime she had lived many lives, as witch, queen, or goddess. Sometimes, do you remember, she was Goldilocks or Snowdrop, you and I efficiently playing the seven dwarfs. Then, when we were a little older, she became Circe, or Brunnhilde—never gypsy, or beggar, or drudge. You always suggested the games and played the dashing hero. Once, I remember, when you were Lochinvar, declaiming loudly: "On all that wide border his steed was the best!" you managed to get yourself and Caroline up on the pony, with the aid

IN THE COUNTRY

of a wooden box, and were all set to lash your mount into a gallop. But the pony balked, and the bridegroom had to come out of character and lead the animal off stage. I had forgotten all about it until Caroline laughingly recalled it to me this morning.

If only our present troubles were no greater than balking Shetlands! You see, in the first place, the hogs have developed some sort of unheard-of disease and are dying right and left. Lord knows how much I've lost in the last week on account of it! Then, too, I lost my head and put in a bigger crop than I had any business to, so that, with two of my hands leaving me, the tobacco bugs are getting a head start. You know what daily attention the plants require. And there is the matter of the pool. We are trying to get these small farmers to go into it to protect them from the monopoly which buys from them at shamefully low prices. I have been out getting as many recruits for the pool as possible.

There's a real man's job for you here. We need you. Get three months' leave, even without pay, and come to Boone County. Stay with us and give me a hand. You'll make money

LETTERS TO A LADY

by it in the end, because your own place needs so much looking after. You're a damn fool if you let that good piece of property go to the devil for want of attention at this point. It needs you, and I need you—and Caroline needs you.

Poor Caroline has a pretty dull time of it here alone with me. Sometimes I'm afraid it was a mistake to bring her to a place where there is almost no opportunity to exercise her own talents. The fine edge is off her wit, lately. She is more sober. If you were here, we might bring back the sparkle. Together, we should have more time to give her. We might all play a little. One or the other of us might occasionally take her to a theatre in Cincinnati, or we could all find time to drive down to Lexington. And I've been hoping that, if you were here, it just might be possible for me to run away with her for a short vacation. It's a long time since we've had the opportunity for that. Come along. There's a horse here for you, and a swimming-hole; and of course there's Caroline to talk to—a little too much for me alone.

JIM.

IN THE COUNTRY

DEAR CAROLINE:

NEW YORK, July 5, '25.

I have just had a letter from Jim, asking me, urging me, to spend the summer in Pinkville and help him with the plantation. I am positive that you know he sent it. It looks to me like a trap—more like a trap or a bed of nettles than like the open-flying gates of Paradise. If I go, my prophetic soul tells me that I shall be in for three months of the most complex misery I have ever experienced. Nothing really impels me to go but a kind of diabolical curiosity to know how miserable a man can make himself by accurately choosing his circumstances with an eye single to that purpose.

Now listen to this, and *answer immediately on your honor*—if you have any honor, in relation to me, which I doubt. Did you, or did you not, put Jim up to that letter? Or did he devise and send it “by his lonesome,” unprompted. If you put him up to it, I won’t come. That’s flat. I’d rather be hanged than come. If he sent it on his own motion, I shall be in Pinkville a week from next Wednesday. PAUL.

P. S.—If you don’t see why I must have an absolutely honest answer, I shall no longer re-

LETTERS TO A LADY

spect either your intelligence or your heart. Don't fail me. Please don't fail me. Of course I am writing to Jim.

NEW YORK,
July 5, '25.

DEAR JIM:

Your letter rather bowled me over. It hadn't occurred to me as a possibility to get off this summer, except for a week or so at a time, up in Connecticut and hereabouts.

I'm awfully obliged to you for casting an eye on my Pinkville "forty" and preventing that jackass from cutting my beeches. If he had touched that grove with an ax, I certainly should have lynched him on the highest tree that he had left standing; and if he had felled them all, I should have beheaded him with his own ax. The other things don't matter; but I'll have to get Spencer out of there, and it would be a pleasure to have a hand—and foot—in the ejection.

I am sorry to hear about your bad luck with the hogs and about your overplanting. Caroline wrote, a while back, that you had seemed a bit worried this spring, but she hasn't said a word about the hogs, and I had rather sur-

IN THE COUNTRY

mised that her assisting recently with the tobacco-planting was one of her larks. I see you are mighty busy. If I can manage it, I'd like nothing better than to "stand by" for a month or so. I'll see Bidwell to-morrow and ask him how long he can let me off. Fortunately, things are slack enough at the office; and I'd have planned a longer vacation at the outset, if I could have afforded it—or had known that I could earn my board by talking to Caroline!

What you said about the old days when she used to visit Pinkville and queen it over the lot of us amused me a good deal. She is like that, isn't she? Still like that. I have been on my knees to her ever since. But, as you say, she really requires a court—and wants all her "subjects" to keep their incense burning.

We all get fed up from time to time on what we are doing, whatever it is, no matter how much we like it; and then we want to rub up against something very different to restore our edge. I have had a bully time this last year in the city; but now I feel sort of burned out—like a hollow tree. I feel a real city man's honing to get hold of an ax—say, Spencer's ax—

LETTERS TO A LADY

and to earn some callouses on the palms of my hands. Whereas I suppose you and Caroline might find more refreshment in a roof-garden.

Anyway, let's get some fun out of it. Looking toward which, I extemporize the following suggestions: (1) Send Caroline East for the summer, you and I to keep house and make the plantation hum; or (2) when things ease up, you and I to take that canoe trip we've talked about for the last five years; or (3) you and Caroline take it, while I paint and potter around the old house; or (4) all three of us take it, you and I to spell one another off at paddling, cooking and bringing the flowers to Caroline! I could vote confidently for (1), (2) and (3); (4) I should regard as frankly experimental. What do you say?

You needn't write. Unless you hear to the contrary, I shall be in Pinkville a week from next Wednesday. As ever,

PAUL.

NEW YORK,
July 5, '25.

DEAR CAROLINE:

In the note to you which I have just posted I forgot to say that I would rather see you this

IN THE COUNTRY

summer than Samarkand, Babylon, Stamboul
and Persepolis.

PAUL.

P. S.—I have only moderate respect for your intelligence and none at all for your heart, but when I think of the light in your eyes I am as helpless as the tide under the moon.

PINKVILLE,
July 12, '25.

DEAR PAUL:

You conjure me to tell you truly, on my honor, whether I put Jim up to inviting you down here for the summer. Why should I tell you? If I gave you my oath on it—"cross my heart, and hope to die"—what good would that be to you, who have "only moderate respect for my intelligence and none at all for my heart"? That being your case, pray how can you be satisfied with my oaths? He who has no faith can never be assured.

But you must have a certain amount of faith if you are to come down here this summer. Otherwise your coming would be intolerable. I wrote you back in March that I wanted to face you squarely, you and all the disturbing issues you aroused. I still mean that

LETTERS TO A LADY

—have meant it all along. But if you have any wisdom at all, you have always really known when I was lying. Jim does. But then, Jim has faith.

You do not ask whether I second Jim in his invitation. You do not wonder whether I want you to come; you know that I do. You know that Wednesday will be a *fête* day here. You know that I shall meet you at the ferry at Rabbit Hash, that I shall drive impatiently down the long gravelled slope to the very water's edge, that the boat will be more desperately deliberate than ever, that all the birds in the big woods will be more lyric that day, and that Jim will be smiling in that way of his that indicates special satisfaction, when we arrive.

But understand, you are not to let Jim's enthusiasm for pigs and tobacco monopolize you altogether. I too shall have plans for you. Together, I'm afraid we are likely to exhaust you completely. But anyway, for your rest and for your writing, you shall have a high windy room opening to the branches of the pines, where you can find refreshment in their rush of cool green sound.

Yes, Wednesday shall become a Day—one

IN THE COUNTRY

of the elect among days, destined for immortal life, blissful or damned. Have you ever seen any of the leaves from my Calendar of Days? One of them, for instance, is May 2d, the date of my leaving New York. Another is the eve of your departure from Boone Co. on a new venture. You came to dinner with us that evening, full of anticipations of the city, of all that you were going to do, of brilliant men and women you would meet. They made me melancholy, and a little homesick with thinking of the past, and lonesome at thought of the future. I was gay and miserable and excited, so that I could hardly make even a bluff at eating. Jim drove you home. Our farewell I hardly remember. It was lost in your eagerness to be on your way. But when you had gone, I made for the top of the hill that rises just beside us. I found it white and frosty with unfriendly moonlight. There was a brittle stillness about the place, and the daisies, thick about my knees, seemed almost to be beaten out of silver, hard and sharp enough to wound one's flesh. . . .

There is another Day, when I saw you first. Dressed up and prim, I was being driven with my Aunt Elizabeth to your mother's to call.

LETTERS TO A LADY

The impressions of that visit that survive are few, but they are still very real. As we rounded a bend going down hill, I remember, and were about to cross the millrace, we saw you lying face down upon the little bridge. You were thin and tanned and barefoot, and your head with its straight brown hair was as near the water as you could get it. I wanted awfully to know what you were gazing at down in those brown depths. Can you remember? Was it motion, change, uncertainty that fascinated you, or was it trout?

We called out to avoid running over you, and you jumped up and stood staring, all wide brown eyes. We stayed a long time, in the old-fashioned way, but, to my great disappointment, not once did you appear, not even when your mother called you and gave me sugar cookies and milk.

There was a Day in France, too—in Touraine. Perhaps you will remember it. I was stationed near the Château de Valerey, that beautiful modern palace untenanted during the war, when you and Jim contrived to get leave at the same time. I arranged for a tryst with you both and wrote you full instructions for meet-

IN THE COUNTRY

ing me in one of the gardens of the château. The garden, dishevelled then, with grass grown high between the flagstones of the path, had formerly been trim and disciplined in true continental style, its walls lined with fruit-trees trained along them like vines, its flowers set neatly apart in beds. In the centre, under a leaning apple-tree, was a large round stone basin—do you remember?—lifted knee-high above the ground and brimfull of clear water.

Jim and I got there first. I shall not soon forget how good it was to see him after so long and so perilous a time. There were excited greetings and eager questions, and then, while we waited for you, quiet conversation, that grew more quiet as the shadow of the tree grew longer. Everything was very still. The pool was utterly smooth and blank and white, and so level full that it seemed even a sudden thought would make it tremble and overflow. Gradually we lapsed into silences as brimming as the pool.

We'd almost given you up when you came, and along with you a little wind that ruffled through the apple-tree, loosing its first petals and carrying them floating down. It set the

LETTERS TO A LADY

surface of the water shimmering, so that it broke into a thousand colors. And yet no drop of water spilled. But all the pool was flushed with floating rose-veined fragments, as exquisite as delight.

CAROLINE.

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200

